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Cecil's Autumn Adventures.—Frontispiece.



"So you are the youngsters that tried to burn me out, eh?"

p. 41.

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CECIL'S

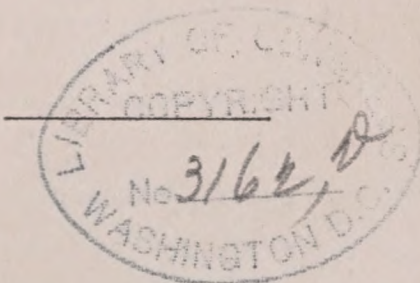
AUTUMN ADVENTURES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"CECIL'S SUMMER AT ELM TERRACE."

Mrs. Clara A. Goodenow.

Farmington, Maine.



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CECIL'S AUTUMN ADVENTURES.

CHAPTER I.

A DAY IN THE NORTH WOODS.



GOOD-BYE, good-bye, good-b-y-e!" called Cecil, climbing on the gate and leaning far over to gaze after the carriage. A white handkerchief fluttered for a moment, mamma's face looked back, and then a curve in the road hid everything but the little cloud of dust which wavered and danced in the sunshine.

"Gone—all gone," said little Benjie, solemnly, turning grave eyes up to his brother, and tightening the grasp of his plump fingers around a fold of his nurse's dress.

Rather a big lump rose in Cecil's throat as he tried to reply, and it seemed as if the cloud of dust had somehow got in his eyes

and made their vision dim. For the carriage was whirling away papa, mamma, and Madge for a long, long absence, and for the first time in his life Cecil was to be separated from both parents. Nurse and Benjie remained, to be sure, and all were to stay at Elm Terrace with dear grandma and Uncle Jack. But nobody could fill mamma's place, and for five minutes Cecil felt very lonely, and much like a young martyr who could never be happy again.

At the end of five minutes a cheerful whistle sounded close at hand, and Cecil's face grew decidedly brighter as he saw Eben Denny hastening across the lawn.

"Hallo, Eben!" he said. "They're all gone."

"I know it—at least I supposed they had," answered his friend. "Aunt Celindy thought you'd feel rather bad, and so she let me come up and see if you wanted to go to North woods."

"Nutting?" said Cecil. "But I thought it was too late for that. I'm sure we've got

bushels of nuts already, and I don't think there can be any more left on the trees."

"We could find plenty if we were squirrels, I guess," said Eben. "However, I didn't mean nuts; I meant woodchucks. Uncle saw tracks when he was up there yesterday, and he is going again to-day. So he said he'd take us and our trap if we wanted to go; and anyhow the squirrels are thick, and very likely we can catch one."

"Well, I'm ready—that is, if grandma is willing, and I think she will be," said Cecil, and the boys walked toward the house, whither nurse had already led Benjie.

Grandma was pleased with the plan, so Cecil went up stairs to put on his thickest play-suit. It was rather desolate—to see mamma's room so empty and still, and to notice the closed blinds and unfurnished shelves in Madge's little chamber opposite his own. Cecil sighed and then smiled.

"I must learn to get along without mamma some time, I do suppose," he murmured to himself. "She certainly can't go to West

Point with me. I'll try and remember what she said about it. But oh dear! I wish I could have gone with her just this time."

It was certainly fortunate that Mr. Denny had business taking him in the direction of North woods that day; it was equally fortunate that his business, whatever it was, did not require him to give his mind to the contemplation of it during his ride there. The two boys laughed and talked so constantly that he could have had little comfort of his meditations, I think.

As it was, he joined sometimes in the chatter, and was in the midst of telling an odd story of his own juvenile days when the North woods appeared at the brow of the next hill, and ride and anecdote came to an abrupt termination.

"There! we've done that four miles in what I call quick time," said Mr. Denny, turning the wheel to let the boys alight. "Now, my business is first at that house yonder, then I shall survey up on the hill. You may strike for the woods as soon as

you like, only mind and keep along where we went yesterday, Eben, and don't go too far in."

"Yes, sir," said Eben. "Take that spade, will you, Cecil, and I'll carry the basket."

"What's in it?" asked Cecil, eying with curiosity the covered basket his friend lifted.

"Turnovers and things," said Eben, comprehensively. "Can you manage the trap too? Come on, then."

"Are you going into the woods?" asked Cecil as the boys set off, treading under foot the crisp brown grass and facing the cool autumn breeze.

"Woodchucks don't live in the woods," said Eben; "uncle told me that yesterday. They live in the fields near woods—in pastures, mostly, and sometimes around and in stone walls."

"Then why aren't they called fieldchucks, I wonder?" said Cecil. "Do they bite?"

"Like sixty," answered Eben. "I'll tell you: let's set our trap for a squirrel just inside the woods, and leave our luncheon-basket

in some good place. Then we'll hunt up the hole we saw yesterday and dig out the little scamp if we have the luck to catch him."

"Dig out?" repeated Cecil.

"Yes; they live in holes—deep ones too; and it'll give us something to do, I can tell you."

"But if he bites, I don't see how we can catch him easily," said Cecil, reflectively.

Eben wisely remarked that they had better wait until the woodchuck's abode was discovered before they planned how to take him, and then proceeded to arrange for depositing the trap. This article, which was an ordinary box-trap, such as almost every boy has seen and used, baited with a half ear of corn and a bit of apple, was soon settled in what Eben's judgment declared a "likely squirrel place," and left to await the coming of such unwary little Bunny as might be attracted to enter it. Then, after a great deal of search, the supposed woodchuck's burrow was discovered—a small hole almost hidden in a knoll in the

pasture adjoining the woods, with a tell-tale little heap of sand near by.

"There, sir!" said Eben, triumphantly. "What'll you bet we find him at home? We'll take turns digging, and I will begin, or you may, just as you like."

"You may, then. Seems to me a wood-chuck must be pretty small if that's his hole," said Cecil, surveying the ground with some dissatisfaction.

"He may be small, but he's smart. It isn't always the biggest that amounts to the most or can do the smartest things," said Eben, with an air of wisdom.

"That reminds me of a funny fable I heard Madge read in her French lesson the other day," said Cecil.

"Tell it," answered Eben, beginning to use his spade energetically in the not very soft earth.

"Well, the birds were going to choose a king. Every one wanted to be it, and they couldn't agree at all, so there was the greatest fluttering and piping you ever heard. Finally

they concluded that the one who could fly up the farthest should be chosen king. They all tried, and of course the eagle flew up, up, up, higher than all the others. But when he got up as far as he could possibly go, and was tired all out and stopped, behold! the little wren had been sitting on the eagle's back without his knowing it, and he flew up ever so much higher, twittering for joy. So he had to be king, though he was almost the littlest bird, because he was so bright and cunning."

"Well," said Eben, stopping to rest, "I call that real mean in the wren. It wasn't fair at all."

"But it was rather cunning," said Cecil.

"It was a cheat, that's what it was," declared Eben, digging away with new vigour. "The eagle did the work and the wren got the credit, and he ought not to have had it. I do despise underhand doings."

Cecil laughed, and taking his turn at the spade, the work went on until even boyish zeal was exhausted.

"I don't believe there's any bottom at all to this hole, or any woodchuck there when we get to it," exclaimed Cecil, at last, looking ruefully at his hands, which were nearly blistered by this unwonted use of them.

"Shouldn't wonder if you were right," said Mr. Denny, with a laugh, suddenly coming over the hill. "Why, Eben, man alive! haven't you found the other hole?"

"Other one?" questioned his nephew, in surprise.

"Why, mostly a woodchuck's burrow has two holes, and it's just as well to find both and stop up one, else he'll go out at one while you dig at the other. Well, never mind," added Mr. Denny, kindly, seeing the astonished disappointment on the faces of the boys. "When you get rather older, you shall have a dog and go woodchuck hunting in style."

"I hate to wait for things until I'm grown up," muttered Cecil, with an extremely cross look.

Eben had the same expression at first, but

it faded away before his uncle's good-natured words.

"Better luck another time," he said; "now rest and eat your luncheon, and then you will feel better. Here! I'll give you a match and you may make a fire on some rock. Boys always like to make fires, I know—at least I did when I was a boy. Only keep clear of the fences and be careful."

"We will," answered the boys, who found the idea of a fire quite consoling; so Mr. Denny went on his way and they set out to get their basket.

Cecil soon thought he had found just the spot for a fire at the opposite side of the pasture, on a flat stone that lay near the angle formed by two sides of the tall rail fence. Eben objected that it was too near this same fence for absolute safety, but his prudence was overruled by the enthusiasm of his friend, and both boys began collecting fuel from the edge of the forest. They soon had a large heap of brush, and carefully applying the match, had the satisfaction of

seeing the tiny flame creep in among the dry wood and take fast hold on it.

The "turnovers and things" proved ample and excellent enough to appease the appetites of even two boys, and their gypsy dinner was a great success.

"I wonder who lives in that queer little house in the field beyond this one?" said Cecil as they sat roasting their apples for dessert—a process which rendered the fruit smoky and warm on one side and on the other cold and hard, but vastly improved its flavour to the taste of the boys.

"I don't know; we might go there and ask for a drink of water," said Eben. "I'm thirsty, aren't you?"

Accordingly, the boys climbed over the fence and took their way down the hill to the small weather-beaten cottage, whose roof sloped on one side nearly to the ground, thus causing the curious shape which had attracted Cecil's attention. A flaxen-haired lad apparently rather older than Eben sat in the door at work with a slate and pencil, while a child

about Benjie's age sprawled on the floor watching him.

"Can we have a drink of water?" asked Cecil, making himself spokesman.

"Yes," said the boy, without looking up. "Harney, get a cup."

Harney obeyed at once, and brought from some room within a shiny tin cup, which Cecil took, and then began to look about for the water in which to use it.

"The well is 'round the corner," said the flaxen-haired boy. "There! I've finished now, and I'll help you pull up the bucket."

"Are you doing your examples?" asked Eben, with a glance at the slate.

"No, only counting up my profits," said the boy, with a laugh. "I've gone into trade."

"How?" asked both the boys.

"I mean I've been selling nuts down at the village, and I was counting up what I'd made to see how much more I want before there is enough."

"Enough for what?" asked Cecil, before

he remembered that it was not exactly a polite question.

"Some things I want," said the lad. "Will you buy some?"

"We have gathered all we want," said Cecil, blushing a little. "Have you ever so many more?"

"Rather a big heap that I hid up in the field. Here's a bucket of water cool as ice could make it; now for the cup!"

The boys drank their fill, and after talking some moments longer departed with such a smiling "Good-bye" from the stranger that our impulsive Cecil pronounced him a "nice boy" as soon as he was out of hearing.

"He looked pretty poor, though," said Eben. "I wonder if he didn't want to buy new clothes with his money? If I hear of anybody who wants nuts in the village, I shall tell them about him."

Now, this was very good-natured in Eben, for he had counted on selling a portion of his own nuts and devoting the proceeds to procuring tools to help in his darling occupation

of wood-carving. Cecil knew this, and knew too that if he did not get the money in this way, it would be slow in coming, since, while Eben's uncle amply provided him with all needful things, he could afford him very little pocket-money.

But any comment on the matter was prevented by their arrival at the trap, which, being examined, was found to contain a fine gray squirrel, over which the boys were holding joyful consultation when a shout from Mr. Denny far down the hill-side bade them hasten to join him and turn toward home.

"You go get the luncheon-basket and I will carry the trap along," said Eben; and Cecil galloped off at headlong speed, intent only on snatching up the article and rejoining his friend in the shortest possible time.

"Did you leave the fire all right?" asked Mr. Denny as the boys climbed into the wagon.

"Cecil went back," said Eben. "He fixed it. It's all right, isn't it, Cecil?"

"I—I believe so," replied Cecil, hesitating, for he knew he had not thought anything

about the fire, or even looked to see if it was wholly extinguished, and Mr. Denny's question made him feel rather uncomfortable.

He consoled himself by the reflection that it must have been all right or he would have noticed it; he certainly was too tired to go back up the hill to see about it.

The drive home was quickly accomplished, and Cecil hastened to tell grandma of all the incidents the day had held. But thoughts of them were quickly scattered when, after a late tea, Uncle Jack walked in. He had accompanied Cecil's parents on their journey as far as a neighbouring town, and the sight of him recalled the morning's parting.

"They loaded me with so many good-byes and messages to you, Cecil, that I could hardly bring them all. The biggest one is in the hall, and you had better bring it in," said Uncle Jack.

Cecil opened the door, wondering what his uncle could mean, and in bounced a little Skye terrier—as funny, bright, and jolly a dog as any little boy could possibly wish to

own. Fastened to the collar about his neck was a small note addressed "To Cecil."

This is what Cecil read in it when he had finished his first raptures at this altogether delightful surprise :

"MY DARLING: It is my wish that you will have many a merry play with the funny little bearer of this note. He is a good-bye gift from papa and me, with our love. We hope he will help you to be less lonely, and will remind you of the last talk we had together and the promises you made to us. Be honest, be brave in the right, be generous ; and so let me find when I return that my boy has used well these weeks of our separation and grown upward toward the true Example I have tried to teach him to follow.

"YOUR LOVING MAMMA."

Cecil read this note a second time just before he went to bed and made a very earnest resolve that he would fulfil his mother's wish.

CHAPTER II.

A DEBATE WITH CONSCIENCE.

 HE race of the Skye terriers is not a small one, but that it ever contained a brighter, more intelligent specimen of doghood than Mop, Cecil doubted after spending a morning in making acquaintance with his new pet. Mop showed at once a good disposition to make himself at home in his new abode; after a prolonged investigation of his master's appearance, he signified his approval of the same by laying his queer little nose on Cecil's knee and barking once and then licking his hand affectionately. He also submitted to be caressed by the other members of the family, and obligingly went through with the list of his accomplishments at the direction of Uncle Jack, who had assisted in his selection and knew what he could do. Only when introduced to Morgiana did

he show any aversion, and he treated that staid and respectable cat to such a series of sharp, quick barks, accompanied with such springs and curvetings of his hairy little body, that she fled up to the garret in utter confusion, and could not be coaxed down for nearly all day.

Benjie's disgust at this proceeding was extreme, but Uncle Jack declared that the two pets could be taught to be friends with time and patience, and that he himself would see that poor puss came to no harm through the impishness of Master Mop.

The squirrel whose capture had been of so much importance the day before was almost disregarded and forgotten; for Eben, who came up to the terrace to see how they should arrange their joint ownership of him, was as delighted with Mop as Cecil himself, and remained to play with him, leaving poor little Bunny unnoticed.

"I don't think Mop is as good a name as I should have chosen," said Cecil, "but I don't think it is best to try and change it. I'll tell

you what, Eben: you shall call him partly your dog and own him with me; only I think he must stay here most of the time, instead of at the lodge, because my mamma sent him."

"Well, that's complete!" agreed Eben, his hazel eyes twinkling with pleasure. "And I'll help you teach him lots of new tricks, and he'll be just the 'cutest little dog in the State, I'll bet you."

"And the happiest little dog too, I hope," suggested grandma. "I shall expect to see you considerate of Mop's feelings as well as of your own wishes."

"Why, of course we shall be kind to him," rather hurt at the idea of anything else being possible.

"I trust so, my dear," said grandma—"at least you will mean to be. But I wanted to suggest to your mind that if somebody should set out to make you the smartest little *boys* in the State, you might not find the process wholly pleasing."

The boys laughed at this remark, but it had the effect grandma intended—of making them

resolve not to give Mop too much and too impatient teaching.

“For, you know,” said Cecil, privately, to his friend, “I do not suppose a dog likes to be always learning lessons any better than we should.”

In spite of the fascinations of Mop, the usual day's duties must not be neglected; so presently Eben went home and Cecil sat down to his books. It was rather hard to fix his mind on work, but he made a brave effort, and got through his arithmetic lesson so well that grandma let him read from a book called “Anecdotes of Sagacious Animals,” and set him to write the copy, “‘*I will*’ makes three steps toward ‘*I have done*’”—a maxim which Cecil wrote with great pride and care in his very best hand.

In the evening Uncle Jack was noticed to look rather grave, and after sitting for some time quite silent he suddenly said, “Cecil!” in a tone that was not quite like his usual merry one.

“What, sir?” answered his nephew.

"What did you do at the North woods yesterday?" inquired Uncle Jack.

"Why, we dug for a woodchuck, and—and caught a squirrel, and—lots of things," said Cecil, who was teaching Mop to balance a bit of bread on his nose and did not feel like being interrupted.

"What else?" pursued Uncle Jack.

"We had our dinner, and got some water at a house, and Eben tore his jacket on the fence, and I lost my knife. We did plenty of things: I told grandma about them," said Cecil, a trifle impatiently.

"Now I want you to tell *me*," said his uncle. "Come and stand here. You made a fire and roasted some apples, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," said Cecil.

"And how did you extinguish it when you had finished eating? Did you or Eben manage that part of it?" asked Uncle Jack.

"Why, we—we just left it, I guess, when we went for the water. Then Mr. Denny asked if it was all right, and I thought it was."

"Did you look to see?"

"N-o-o, not particularly," said Cecil, slowly.

"What do you mean, Uncle Jack?"

"I mean that your fire in the pasture was not properly taken care of, and that by its means several rods of the pasture fence were burned up and more mischief was near being done. Mr. Plummer came to see about it to-day. It made him a great deal of trouble," said Uncle Jack, gravely.

"Oh dear!" sighed Cecil, feeling almost ready to cry at this ill news.

"Also there was a poor boy living near by who is trying to earn money by selling nuts, so that he can pay for his winter's schooling. He had hidden a large heap of nuts in the corner of the fence, and they were burned too."

"That's the very boy we talked with, I shouldn't wonder," said Cecil. "What was his name?"

"Larry Holbrook, I believe," said Uncle Jack. "It was quite a loss to him, of course."

"He was rather careless to leave them out in that way, I think," said Cecil.

"You were rather careless to build your fire so near the fence, I think," said Uncle Jack, with a little smile. "Didn't any one caution you about that?"

"Yes," said Cecil, slowly; "Mr. Denny did, and we said we'd take care. I—I—well, the fact is, Uncle Jack, I wanted to put the fire where we did, and Eben said it was too near. But I thought I knew as well as he did."

"I'm glad you are honest," said Mr. Burney, smoothing his nephew's curls. "I found Mr. Denny about to punish Eben for being so careless, but I asked him to wait, for there were two boys concerned in the matter, and I thought both ought to share the punishment."

"What is my punishment to be?" asked Cecil, after a little silence.

"I don't know that I shall inflict any penalty," answered Uncle Jack. "By your account, you were both careless in building the fire, and you, Cecil, were the most so."

Also, you were not quite honest in not telling Mr. Denny that you didn't examine the fire when he asked you about it. If you had, he would have sent you back to see about it, and all this trouble would have been saved."

"I was dreadfully tired," murmured Cecil.

"Mr. Plummer was tired after his day's labour, I presume," said Uncle Jack, "but he had to go to work and fight fire to prevent other things besides his fence from burning up. We have had so little rain that the rails were very dry and burned rapidly after they once took fire."

"I'm very sorry, Uncle Jack, and I know I deserve something for being so careless. You might put me to bed for all day, perhaps, or give me some hard task to do," said Cecil, rather dolefully. "I think I should remember to be careful another time without any punishment, but I suppose I ought to have one."

Uncle Jack could not forbear laughing at the candid speech of his nephew.

"But I don't see that putting you to bed

will help the matter any," said he. "I know this will be a lesson to you to be careful, especially about fire, and perhaps about other things too. But there are two people who have suffered because of you, and the damage you caused isn't mended in any way. That is the point, I think. What are you going to do about it? Do you think just being sorry is enough?"

"I don't know," answered Cecil, in a very hesitating tone, for he began to understand where Uncle Jack was leading him, and did not feel well pleased at the prospect. "Eben and I can't make a fence very well; and anyhow, Mr. Plummer is a man, and we are only boys."

"Boys can act justly, I suppose," suggested Uncle Jack. "Well, I'm not going to talk any more about it. I have said all I wish, and you may think the matter over; if thinking about it gives you any new ideas on the subject, you may report them to me any time to-morrow."

So saying, Uncle Jack patted his nephew's

curls once more; and rising from his chair, he whistled to Mop and began a frolic with that ready little dog.

It is certainly a fact, if not an altogether praiseworthy one, that Cecil hastened to bed when the hour came with as much speed as possible, composing himself to sleep at once and driving away all thoughts that tried to busy his mind. And he hoped, too, that he should not wake up next morning until just in time for breakfast. But somehow this last hope was not fulfilled, and even earlier than his habit Cecil's eyes opened to the gray morning light, and in a twinkling he was wide awake, body and mind.

"Oh dear!" sighed Cecil to himself as he turned on his pillow. "Now I've got to think it over."

And so there began a debate in the boy's mind on the subject he had tried so hard to forget.

"Well," thought Cecil, "there's that boy's nuts. I suppose I ought to give him those I have gathered. I wonder how many he

had? I 'most know it will take all mine, and I do want 'em myself to crack in the winter evenings, and make candy with, and give to Sylvie Deane. Eben ought to give part; he was some to blame. He knew more about fires than I did, and he ought not to have let me build it there if I did want to. Hm! I don't think much of this business."

Cecil shut his eyes closely and lay very still for a few moments, but it was of no use; sleep would not come back to him.

"And the fence!" he burst out again, suddenly. "I wonder if Uncle Jack thinks we ought to pay the man for that? I don't see how we can. We are only boys, and I'm sure that man has more money than we have. Besides, I'm saving all mine for Christmas, and I shouldn't have enough, any way. Bother!"

Here Cecil stopped and relieved his feelings by kicking the bedclothes violently. Then he grew quiet, and something seemed to whisper the words his mother had written: "Be honest."

"Well," said Cecil, "I s'pose it wasn't very honest in me not to tell Mr. Denny I hadn't looked at the fire, and I know it is honest for folks to pay for things when they spoil 'em. Hm! I always thought it was easy enough to be honest: I guess it isn't."

"Be generous," whispered the little voice again.

"Well, that would be to not let Eben give any of his nuts, because he wants to sell them, and I have more things than he does all the time. Oh dear! I 'most wish mamma wasn't so particular to have me an extra good boy. I'd rather be only half good—at least, that is easiest," groaned poor little Cecil, with a sound that was partly a laugh and partly a sob.

When grandma looked into the room somewhat later, he was lying on his face, and she could see only the back of his curly head. Thinking him asleep, she was about to close the door, when Cecil's voice sounded from somewhere under the curls:

"Grandma dear!"

"What, my pet?" asked grandma, coming to the bedside.

"Grandma, when people do harm and don't mean to, do you think it is just as bad as if they went and did it on purpose?" quavered the voice.

"No, of course not," said grandma, cheerfully.

"Then," said Cecil, bringing one cheek around to view—"then if they don't mean to do it, do you think they ought to—to pay for it?"

"Do you mean if they do it from carelessness and not from wilfulness?" asked grandma, with the least bit of a smile on her lips.

"Yes'm," answered Cecil.

"Then this is what I think," said grandma: "we really haven't any right to be careless—carelessness is a fault. If I take Benjie to walk, and then neglect him, so that he falls in the water and is drowned, I'm not so wicked as if I pushed him in, of course, but I am to blame for not being careful of such

a tiny child. If my carelessness injures other people, I am wrong, and ought to pay the penalty, because it is certainly my duty not to be careless. That is one of the faults I must be on my guard against. Jane set the muffins to raise last night, and then left the door open, so that Morgiana got in and upset the pan on the floor. She did not mean to do it, but I don't think you and I would like it very well if she gave us nothing for breakfast. We should say she ought to atone for her carelessness by making egg-cake for us to eat."

Grandma said this with such a cheery voice that Cecil could not help laughing, and then she kissed him and left him to dress, saying that the cakes would be ready as soon as he was.

Cecil plunged his curly head into the cool water, feeling, for some reason, vastly happier than he did when he first opened his eyes half an hour ago.

Breakfast was earlier at the lodge than at the terrace; so when Cecil was ready to

go out of doors, he found Eben already waiting for him on the piazza steps.

"Do you know about it?" was Cecil's question as soon as he saw his friend.

"Should think I did!" was Eben's prompt reply. "My land! Uncle Denny was just as mad as sixty. He said I ought to have known better; and that is a fact. I expected to get well punished, but Mr. Burney came along. I did feel ashamed to think I didn't do better and attend to things."

"But I wanted to have the fire where it was, and you didn't," said Cecil, helped in his effort to be generous by Eben's ready taking up of the whole blame.

"I saw all those leaves in that corner; didn't you?" continued Eben. "I suppose they covered that boy's nuts. Wasn't it queer in him to leave 'em out so? Only he hadn't any good place to store them."

"I shall give him my nuts to make up," said Cecil, soberly. "I was more to blame than you, and I ought to pay the most."

"My land! I guess I see myself letting

you do that!" cried Eben, flushing to the roots of his red hair at the idea.

Whereupon the boys entered on a discussion which lasted some time, but ended in their seeking Uncle Jack with one mind.

"Well?" said he as they came to his side; and Uncle Jack's eyes had a sly gleam in them that showed something amused him.

"We want to pay for what we did—up in the field, you know," said Cecil—"that is, if we can pay for it all. We will give Larry Holbrook as many nuts back as he lost, and pay Mr. Plummer for the fence as far as our money will go. We can make out a dollar and a half both together."

In spite of his resolution, a little sigh escaped Cecil at the last words.

"Well done!" said Uncle Jack. "You will make men, I see."

And to the great delight of the lads, he shook hands with them both as gravely as if they had indeed been grown up. Then he agreed to take them both to see Mr. Plummer in the afternoon.

CHAPTER III.

AN EXPEDITION TO PENNYVILLE.

ARRY HOLBROOK thankfully received the nuts which the boys carried him in payment for the loss their carelessness had occasioned, and they became quite well acquainted with him during their call. He was making a brave struggle against poverty, for his father was dead; and besides Larry and the small Harney, there were four other little Holbrooks to be fed and clothed by the widowed mother; so Larry's share of the burden was not light.

“Selling berries and nuts brings in something, and is better than no help at all,” he confessed to Eben. “But I want to get some more learning, and then I shall be fit to get me a trade. Mr. Jones thinks he’ll take me into his shop by another year; and then by

and by I shall earn enough to support the whole."

"Come to Elm Terrace next time you are at the village, and my uncle Jack will lend you some books if you want any to help you," said Cecil, who was filled with admiration at what he called Larry's "pluck."

"I'm getting on pretty well by myself and what teaching mother gives me," said Larry, sturdily. "If you wanted to lend any picture-books to Susie, I should like that, and I am sure she would like to have them. She's sick 'most all the time, and don't have much to look at."

Cecil assented to this proposal gladly, for he pitied the pale, patient-looking little girl; and then Uncle Jack took the lads to see Mr. Plummer and settle affairs with him.

They found him at work in one of his barns—a large, black-bearded man who turned to meet them silently, chewing all the time on a bit of straw that Cecil certainly thought would choke him.

"Here are two young men who have some

business with you, Mr. Plummer," said Uncle Jack, presenting the boys.

"If you please, sir," said Cecil, rather timidly—"if you please, we want to see about paying for your fence."

"So you are the youngsters that tried to burn me out, eh?" said Mr. Plummer, with a bite at the end of the straw.

"We let your fence get on fire, but we didn't go to do it," said Eben. "I was real careless, but 'twasn't on purpose."

"And all our money makes a dollar and a half," added Cecil. "Will it be enough to repair the damage done by the fire? We haven't any more, though."

"Rail fences aren't so costly as some things, that's a fact," said the farmer. "And so you want to pay for the damage?"

"We think we ought to; it's honest to do it, anyhow," said Cecil, holding up the small wallet containing the cherished pocket-money of himself and his friend.

The farmer took it, looked at it, turned it over, and handed it back.

"I'd rather not take your money, boys," he said. "Let's fix it another way."

"How?" asked Eben and Cecil at once.

"Well, you see, this fence business is a bother, that's a fact. 'Tisn't the cost of the rails, but I'm very busy this week, and will have to take a man off work here at the barn and set him to patch that up. Now, how'll it be for you two youngsters to come up and work for me a forenoon?—help me sort apples, or some such thing as he'd be doing if he hadn't to make fence? Then I will call it square all round. Does that suit?" said Mr. Plummer, very gravely.

"My land! I just guess it does!" exclaimed Eben, who was first to find his tongue. "Don't it, Cecil?"

"Yes, indeed," said Cecil; and he felt so much like standing on his head for joy that he gave a little caper where he stood.

"Then it's a bargain," said Mr. Plummer. "And I think well of your pluck, and better of your honesty."

So the matter was settled, and the next

day Mr. Denny carried the boys to the farm again, and there they worked all the morning, sorting apples for market under the direction of Mr. Plummer and one of his sons.

It was real labour, and the boys' arms and backs grew lame and weary, but they worked faithfully and with a cheerful spirit, until at three o'clock they were dismissed with cordial words from the farmer and their pockets filled with golden pippins.

"And we have had four good rides out of the scrape," said Eben as they drove home. "I think we have got out of trouble pretty well this time."

"So do I," assented Cecil. "It was the best thing for us that Mr. Plummer wanted our work instead of our money, wasn't it? But my back does feel as if it had a hinge in it."

The autumn days passed swiftly by; the last bright leaves fell one by one from the trees; the garden was a brown wilderness of withered stalks and leafless shrubs, and the autumn rains began to come with such

frequency and power that Eben declared his belief that they were having at least a dozen "equinoctials" one after the other.

It was one dull, cool day, when the clouds seemed to have settled over the sky in a kind of gray sullenness, as if they wouldn't trouble themselves to rain, but didn't mean to let the sun have a chance at the earth, when Uncle Jack came into the house and sought grandma in the cheerful library, where she was usually to be found of afternoons.

"Do you think you can get along without me for a few days, mother mine?" said he.

"Why, yes, Jack," said grandma, pushing up her spectacles to look at her son. "Is anything particular the matter?"

"I want to go up to Pennyville," said Uncle Jack. "These late heavy rains have been making havoc all about there, and I suspect I ought to look after the mills. I can take Bayard in the light wagon and drive up to-morrow, and be back by the third day, I presume."

"Oh, Uncle Jack!" said Cecil, very eagerly,

dropping his book suddenly and springing from his chair.

"Well?" said Uncle Jack.

"May I—won't you—can't I go too? You told me once I might go to Pennyville some time, and I never have been yet. I want to see the mills and everything. Do please say 'yes!'" cried Cecil, tumbling the words one over the other in his excitement.

"Then who will take care of grandma?" asked Mr. Burney.

"I guess she can get along; can't you, grandma?" replied Cecil, turning such pleading eyes toward the dear old lady that she kissed him at once and declared he need by no means stay on her account.

"There's another thing," said Uncle Jack: "the roads are not in very good condition; and if I take you, we two shall not balance the wagon evenly, which will be bad for the springs."

"Oh," said Cecil, "if that is all, you can take Eben too, and that will make a good load to balance."

"So you think the heavier a load is, the better it is for the wagon?" said his uncle, pretending to look dissatisfied. "Well, I think I will take you—that is, if you can tell me how many Skye terriers will reach from here to Pennyville if each dog is a yard long and every dog's nose touches the next one's tail."

"Just as many dogs as there are yards in twenty-three miles," answered Cecil, triumphantly. "And how many that is I can find out with a pencil. Only if they were all as wriggly as Mop, they wouldn't make a very easy measuring string. May we really go, then? Oh, you dear, jolly Uncle Jack!"

Cecil went frisking about the room in his joy until grandma turned him out of doors to expend his force in racing down to tell Eben of the promised expedition. But though Mrs. Denny received him graciously, and gave no denial to the news he brought, she refused to let him see Eben, who was put to bed for the afternoon as a penalty for some fault he had committed.

"Hasn't he been there long enough to be forgiven, Mrs. Denny?" pleaded Cecil, longing for the release of his playmate to be granted.

"Not he; and he'll have to walk sharp, or he can't be allowed to go with you at all," replied Eben's aunt, decidedly.

"I can't walk anyhow, as long as you keep me stretched out here in bed, Aunt Celindy," called Eben through the half-open door of the bedroom. "But I won't never try any more 'speriments in your best china teapot, nor take the lamp chimney to make a battery of again."

"You had better not," retorted his aunt. "I wish you had never heard about your steam and your chemistry, and such nonsense. Run away, Cecil; I suppose he can go to Pennyville if he behaves when to-morrow comes."

"And I will behave real hard," added Eben; so with this consolation his friend was forced to be content, and went back to the terrace eating a slice of Mrs. Denny's

warm gingerbread and wondering what mischief Eben could have done this time.

Whatever it was, he was not prevented from appearing next morning at the terrace as merry, as rosy, and as brisk as if no such things as punishments were numbered among his experiences, bringing in his hand a very small, neatly-packed hand-bag, and revolving in his mind his aunt's parting advice :

"Hold up your head and remember your manners ; don't make anybody any trouble that you can avoid, and help other folks as much as you can. You're to mind Mr. Burney the same as Cecil does, and be sure not to lose all your handkerchiefs before you get back."

"Isn't it jolly?" said Cecil, running down the steps to meet him. "I've been up ever since five o'clock, and Uncle Jack threatened to lock me up in the icehouse if I didn't keep stiller. There comes the wagon around to the door. If Uncle Jack would only let us drive Bayard part of the time, I should be perfectly happy."

But this Uncle Jack would not do, though in all other ways he made the ride as pleasant as possible. The day was cool and cloudy; but the boys felt sunshine if they could not see it. They chattered and laughed, sang and told stories; and when a sudden heavy shower came down on them, and there was no house in sight wherein to seek shelter, the boys esteemed it only "fun" to creep close together under the large rubber cape Uncle Jack had provided for such an emergency.

The roads were not in excellent order, owing to the storms which had been prevailing, and they had several of what Cecil delighted to call adventures, in crossing places deeply washed out by rain, or in going around large stones that had been rolled down into the road. Once Uncle Jack himself was rather at a loss what to do when they came where a little bridge had been broken and partly torn away. It was Eben who had the glory of suggesting its reconstruction by means of rails from the neighbouring fence, and both boys worked to such purpose that

Mr. Burney declared a grown man could not have been more helpful.

"Then I think you must be glad I coaxed you to let us come," said Cecil, importantly, as they resumed their journey.

"We haven't reached the end yet," replied Uncle Jack, with a comical glance. "How can I tell if you will continue such helpful companions?"

"Wait and see if we don't," said his nephew, with great confidence, inwardly resolving that no boy should be more well behaved and manly than himself during the next three days.

Pennyville was not a large town: it was not much of a village, even. Its houses were scattered along the sides of a somewhat long and narrow valley, clustering in one place more closely together around the post-office and several stores, then rambling here and there, dotting the landscape, in the direction of two large mills which stood on the bank of the river. The river itself was nothing remarkable in size, and wound its

way through the valley soberly enough, while on both sides of Pennyville rose steep hills, and yet steeper mountains.

"There is no comfortable hotel here," said Uncle Jack, in answer to a question from Cecil. "I am going to take you to the house of a man I know very well, and who is connected with the mills I want to see about. Here we are now."

So saying, Uncle Jack reined up Bayard, and greeted a tall, dark man who walked with a peculiar limping gait, and was followed by a very large black Newfoundland dog.

"Good-evening, Mr. Burney; glad to see you, sir. I have been thinking this weather would bring you along to look after us," said the man, whom Uncle Jack proceeded to introduce to the boys as Mr. Keep, and who greeted them very kindly.

"Come in, come in," said Mr. Keep. "You will find a welcome, and, what's more to the point, I fancy, a supper too."

"I *am* hungry, that's true enough," whispered Cecil to Eben as they alighted. "I

'most feel as if I could do what nurse says, and eat a peck of nails."

"Better not try it," returned Eben. "What a great noble fellow that dog is! I do hope he'll let us play with him."

Mr. Keep's house was a small, low cottage, standing on a street which lay at right angles from the main one of the village and led down toward the river and the long covered bridge. A pleasant-faced woman welcomed our travellers and ushered them into a cosy room lighted and warmed by an open fire, near which sat an aged woman in cap and spectacles, while a round, rosy baby crept about on the floor at her feet. A little girl with her hair braided and tied in two funny little knobs at her temples, and wearing a necklace of large yellow beads around her plump neck, was also in the room, but she seemed shy, and hid behind the old lady's chair when Cecil smiled at her.

The supper which Mr. Keep had promised was soon ready; and what a good supper it was!

When it was over, and everybody drew around the bright fire, the significant glances exchanged by the boys showed that so far they considered Pennyville very pleasant indeed. The old lady was called "Grandma Hausen" by all the family, and the little girl possessed the rather long name of Laura Angeline, which was always spoken in full by her mother. The black dog made one of the circle, and permitted himself to be patted and praised without stint by the guests; he rejoiced in the name of "Lion," which was considered extremely appropriate to him by the boys.

"He's just as gentle as can be, and lets me ride the baby on his back and tease him all I want to," said Laura Angeline, who was beginning to feel quite well acquainted with the strangers. "But he can be just the fiercest dog you ever saw, and he's strong; oh, strong as a real lion, 'most."

"I never saw such a large dog," said Cecil. "His back reaches about as high as the table, I should think. Can he do any tricks?"

"He can do something better than tricks," said Mr. Keep. "He can save a man's life."

"How? Do tell us about it," begged the boys.

So Mr. Keep complied, and the children gathered about his knee, and Uncle Jack also prepared to listen.

"It was nearly five years ago, before I had anything to do with the mills—before one of them was built, in fact," said Mr. Keep. "The big bridge you saw down the road was not standing then, either. In its place we had one much lighter and not so strong. There came up one of our freshets, such as we sometimes get here; it was rather the worst we ever had, I think. Folks began to fear the bridge wouldn't stand it, the water was so high. And still it rained and the water grew higher, until it seemed as if the bridge must give way pretty soon.

"By and by a considerable crowd of us were gathered down at the edge of the water watching the bridge. A good many were paddling around in boats, and the widow

Parton's son had got hold of a little skiff and was rowing around alone. He wasn't very bright—in fact, people called him more than a quarter foolish; and he never ought to have been allowed to touch a pair of oars. However, he got at them before any one knew it, and presently he got talking with some boys and daring them to one thing and another, until finally that fellow rowed right off to the bridge, helped by the current, which was pretty strong; and if you'll believe me, we saw him try to climb up on the bridge itself. And of course—poor foolish fellow!—he never thought of his boat; so when he got fairly hold of the framework to climb up, the boat went drifting off down stream, and there he was."

"What did he do? Did he drown?" asked Cecil, excitedly.

"Well, there he was, a-clinging to the timbers, and there we were, expecting every minute the bridge might go, from the pressure of the waters. However, some of us went out in a couple of boats, and we managed to

get him off. But I was the last one to get away from the bridge, and just at that minute one end of it broke loose, and away it went. I clung hold of a plank or a timber or something. I never rightly remembered all about those few minutes—they were considerable hard ones; but another bit of wood struck my legs, and of course that finished me as far as knowing anything was concerned. People said I went whirling down the current along with the planks, but Lion here plunged in and towed me ashore. It was a hard fight for him; he couldn't have done it if he wasn't about as strong as a horse. But he did, and got me to land with the breath pretty nearly knocked out of us both. That's what gave me this twist in my leg."

Eben drew a long breath as the story was ended, while Cecil impulsively hugged the noble dog and pressed his face against Lion's black curls.

"Tell us some more about him, please?" asked Eben, after a pause.

"It's rather late now for telling any more,"

said Mr. Keep. "To-morrow Angie can tell you any amount of his doings."

So saying, Mr. Keep lifted a large book from the shelf near the clock and began family worship. It was a very brief exercise, but the boys listened to every word of the earnest prayer, and particularly enjoyed the simple hymn, in which even Angie joined, singing in a clear little voice that Cecil thought exceedingly pretty.

Then Mrs. Keep took the boys up stairs to a little low chamber in which the wall sloped down on one side nearly to the head of the neat white bed, and where there was a picture on the wall of Angie as a very little girl in a pink frock and blue shoes, and with short little curls in place of the funny braids on her temples.

In the midst of a discussion on the story they had heard the boys suddenly fell fast asleep, and so Uncle Jack found them when, a little later, he looked in on his way to his own room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FLOOD.

CBEN, Eben, are you awake?" said Cecil very early the next morning, looking over to the pillow where his friend's red hair was glowing in the first dawning light.

"What?" returned Eben, drowsily. "Awake? No, not exactly."

"Do wake all up, then," said Cecil. "I want to talk. Don't you hear that noise on the roof? Do you know what it means?"

"Rain, I s'pose," replied Eben, turning over and rubbing his eyes. "Say, Cecil, what if there should be a freshet while we are here?"

"Uncle Jack said the river was very high already, so perhaps there will be one. I was thinking that if it rains all day he won't let us go 'round out-doors with him. Though,

to be sure, we have both brought our rubber boots," added Cecil, as if he found that a comforting reflection.

"I s'pose we could have a pretty good time in the house with Lion and that little girl; but it wouldn't be so complete, I know," answered Eben. "Do you think she's pretty?"

"Not so extra—not like Sylvie Deane," replied Cecil, thoughtfully. "Sylvie is the prettiest girl there is. But I like Angie, and I mean to ask her to tell us some more stories about Lion. Isn't he splendid? Which should you like best, Eben—a dog like him or one like Mop?"

"I suppose I should like the one I had best," said Eben, with calm philosophy. "There wouldn't be any use in liking the other kind, as I see."

"I should like to have both kinds," said Cecil, decidedly. "But then I don't ever expect to—that is, until I am a man. At any rate, you can like things that you don't have without hurting anybody, I suppose."

"Well, yes, if liking and wanting what

other folks have don't keep you from having a good time with your own things," assented Eben. "Aunt Celindy says people ought to be contented with what God gives them, and so I try to be; only if I can contrive a good way to get some more things that I want and haven't got, I just do it."

"But you couldn't contrive a way if God wasn't willing for you to have them," rejoined Cecil.

"Of course; but some people seem as if they'd never try for anything if it didn't fall right into their hands, and they call that being contented. That isn't my way, I know," remarked Eben, with a great deal of energy. "Come, let's get up."

In view of the rubber boots, Uncle Jack did consent that the boys should accompany him in his out-door explorations, although the rain continued to fall steadily throughout the day. So during the forenoon they splashed about in the wake of Mr. Keep and Uncle Jack, inspecting the mills and taking observations up and down the valley. It had rained

all night, and there was already what the boys called quite a respectable freshet; the water covered all the low intervale-land lying along the river, and had even overflowed a portion of what in Pennyville was called the "lower road," the same on which Mr. Keep's house stood. The garden adjoining it was partly under the water, though the house was still some distance above it, and Angie pointed out to the boys a tree in the garden which marked the highest limit a freshet had been known to reach. They thought it must be rather nice to live where yearly inundations were the rule, but Angie did not agree with them. It came too near, she said, and she was always afraid.

"Poh!" said Cecil. "I shouldn't be, I know. I should 'most like to have it come up, so as to be a little dangerous, and then rescue somebody, as your father did."

"I rather think you wouldn't like to come out of it with a lame leg, as he did," remarked Eben, dryly; and Laura Angeline entirely agreed with him.

After dinner the boys were told to remain in the house and find their enjoyment there, and in this situation Lion was invaluable. He submitted to assist in all the plays which the children could devise. He was a bear in a den of chairs, and captured with much bravery by the boys; he was a real caged lion, and Eben acted as Van Amburgh, with Cecil, Angie, and the baby for audience; he growled a trifle at an attempt to insert Eben's red head between his powerful jaws, and Mrs. Keep interfered at this point in the game. Then he was a horse for all the party, and gave each one a ride three times around the room on his back, after which everybody subsided on the floor near the fire, and Angie related the wonderful deeds of Lion's prowess. She told how he once captured a thief who tried to steal her father's horse and lead him from the stable, and how, when a crowd of cruel boys were tormenting a little stray dog, Lion had rushed, barking and leaping, among them, and scattering them, picked up the abused little creature by the nape of the neck

as a cat carries her kittens and trotted composedly home to lay it at the feet of his mistress.

“But I think the best thing was about the fire,” added Angie. “That was not long ago. Mother left him alone here with the baby asleep in the cradle while she went to do some work up stairs. Grandma Hausen and I were away. A great coal snapped out on the floor pretty near the cradle. There was a heap of cloth close by that mother had left there—she was getting it together to braid a mat—and the coal set it on fire a little. Lion saw it begin to smoke, and he began to bark; mother heard him, and then heard a kind of a crash, so she came in a hurry. What do you think he had done? A pail of water was on the shelf, and he just jumped up and tumbled it down; so when mother opened the door, there was the water all over the floor and Lion barking with all his might at a little smoke that came from a corner of the cloth that didn’t get wet: when she put it out he was quiet enough. So if it hadn’t been for

that, the baby might have been burned up, and the house too."

Angie pounced on her small brother as she ended, and kissed him vigorously, while baby crowed and jumped as if he remembered all about it; and the boys agreed that Lion was in truth the most praiseworthy of dogs.

By this time it was twilight, and the entrance of Uncle Jack and Mr. Keep put an end to further story-telling, as every one was anxious to hear their report of the flood, the damage it had done, and might still be expected to do.

The waters had never been known to rise so high; fields which had hitherto been esteemed above any possible line of overflow were now submerged, and as yet there was no abating of the steadily-rising flood.

"We must give up the west mill and the big bridge, I am afraid," said Mr. Keep. "I've never seen anything to compare with this in my day; and if the dam at the upper end of the valley breaks, I don't see where things will stop."

"Oh, father!" said Angie, looking ready to cry.

"Don't worry, dear," said Mr. Keep. "Father's daughter will be taken care of. 'Tisn't likely the water'll come up here, even if it does get rather above the mark of the tree."

"Are you going out again?" asked Mrs. Keep, after supper, as she saw her husband begin to exchange slippers for boots again and bring forward two lanterns to be lighted.

"Mayn't I go too, Uncle Jack? Do let me go with you, please—please!" cried Cecil, unable to restrain his eagerness any longer.

"Certainly not," replied his uncle; "it is out of the question. Stay pleasantly here; and if I do not return until late, go to bed when Mrs. Keep tells you it is time."

Cecil frowned angrily and pouted in a way he had not been seen to do for a long time, but he didn't speak. He and Eben stood at the open door to see their friends depart, and gazed longingly after them. The evening was quite dark; the rush and roar of the

waters seemed to fill the air, while occasional shouts and voices were heard above that sound, and lights gleamed at various points up the valley where men were out watching the progress of the flood.

"I want to go!" cried Cecil, at last, stamping his foot violently. "I know I am big enough, and I'm sure there are lots of boys out to-night. It's a shame!"

"And I *will* go! so there!" said Eben, suddenly, from the darkness at his side.

"Uncle Jack said 'No:,' so it's no use to talk that way," answered Cecil, a little sulkily.

"He didn't say it to *me*; I never asked him a word. He told *you* to stay here and go to bed: and so you can. I'm going after them now, and take my punishment in the morning if I must:" and before his friend could reply, Eben seized his cap and rushed out of the door in the direction where two lanterns swinging along the road indicated the presence of Uncle Jack and Mr. Keep. He did not absolutely overtake them, knowing that he would be sent back if discovered;

but keeping in the darkness just beyond the gleaming circle spread by the lanterns, he splashed quietly along, the sense of wrongdoing in his mind for the present quite overpowered by the fascinating novelty of time and situation.

It was evident from snatches of conversation which he overheard that the west mill was the present object of anxiety to his guides; and when they came in view of it, Eben could not wonder. The water was on a level with the lower windows, pressing in a dark, resistless current against the side of the building, which even as they looked seemed to sway and settle down in the turbid flood.

"Just in time to see it go," said Mr. Keep, in an odd sort of tone that made Eben wish he could see his face.

But there was little time for thinking about that; the next moment, with a slow, grinding, reluctant sort of crash, as if the timbers hated to be torn apart, one end of the mill swung round and floated down the stream, leaving

the other end standing, a jagged fragment of displaced beams and shattered walls. There was a little murmur among the spectators, and Eben pinched his hands together very tightly with a thrill of excitement, ejaculating just above his breath,

“My land!”

“More water than land, I should think,” said a voice in the dusk close at his side. “The bridge will go next, and then what’ll you say?”

“Do you think the bridge will go?” asked Eben, eagerly, making out that the speaker was a lad apparently several years older than himself.

“Certain,” said the youth; and Eben opened his mouth to question further, when a hand fell on his shoulder and drew him into the glare of Uncle Jack’s lantern.

“Eben Denny? It is Eben, surely! How did you get here?”

“Ran away after you,” replied Eben, promptly, very much chagrined at being captured thus early in his exploits.

"Then you may run back again. Did you not understand what I said to you boys?" asked Uncle Jack, rather sternly.

"Yes, sir, but I wanted to come. Please let me stay now I'm here, Mr. Burney, and finish out my badness. I'll take a double punishing to-morrow: indeed I will."

There was such a droll mixture in Eben's words and voice of pleading, excuse, and honesty that Uncle Jack couldn't help smiling to hear it, and the boy followed up his advantage by adding,

"Besides, I don't know the way back to the house without a lantern, nor very well with one; that's a fact."

"Frank Ross can take him back—a part of the way at least," said Mr. Keep, who stood near. "It's no place for him here. Frank, take this little chap in hand, will you? Just anchor him at my house, or leave him at the bend in the road close by there."

There was no help for it; and Eben, with much inward disgust at being called a "little chap," and at his fate generally, submitted

to put his hand in that of the big boy who had spoken to him, and be led off through the dusk. Thus we will leave him for the present and see how it had fared with Cecil meantime.

To say that he had been astonished at his friend's abrupt departure would be to state his feelings with extreme mildness. When he recovered breath enough, his first impulse was to shout loudly and rush in pursuit of the runaway. But at that very moment Laura Angeline opened the door, and said,

"Why don't you come in, boys?"

"There isn't but one boy here," answered Cecil, bringing into the light a very red and excited face. "Eben has run off after Uncle Jack, and I think he's the naughtiest, meanest—"

"I wouldn't say what I thought just now," said Grandma Hausen, gently, interrupting Cecil's impetuous speech. "Don't make two wrongs out of one by adding hard words to his disobedience."

Cecil swallowed his hasty words and his

rising anger, but he had to stand a long time glowering into the fire before he could remark slowly,

“Generally, Eben is a pretty good boy, and does obey.”

“That’s right,” said the old lady, stroking Cecil’s curly head. “Angie, get some of your chestnuts and roast ’em here in the ashes.”

Angie obeyed, and the children began to amuse themselves quite cheerfully. Everybody seemed to try to make Cecil forget all unpleasant things; and though he could not help an occasional wish that he might share in Eben’s out-door adventures, he was, on the whole, tolerably happy.

The rushing sound of the flood was audible in the house, and several times Mrs. Keep went to the door and looked out. Once, Lion, who had been sniffing and growling in an uneasy fashion, accompanied her, and leaped barking down the steps, as if he meant to seek his master. It was useless to call him back, and Mrs. Keep shut the door, saying

it could not be long now before all the absent ones returned. But the fire burned low, and no sound of footsteps greeted the ears of the listeners about it.

Another sound began to be heard, however—a curious ripple of water close at hand, and quite different from the steady roar that filled the air.

“What is it, mother?” asked Angie.

For answer, Mrs. Keep rose hurriedly, and with a startled face opened the door into the hall. A little tide met her at the threshold, splashed over her feet, gurgled into the room; the flood had risen far above the mark of the tree in the garden. It was fast rising higher yet; it was filling the very house itself.

CHAPTER V.

THE RESCUE.

HE startled group rose to their feet, standing a moment in irresolute alarm, until Angie broke the silence with a little scream of terror:

“Oh, mother, mother! We shall be drowned!”

“It must be that the dam at the upper end of the valley has fallen; there was never anything like this before,” said Mrs. Keep, speaking firmly, though she looked rather pale. “Don’t cry, dear; we shall be all right somehow.”

“Don’t you think we shall be drowned?” asked Cecil, tremulously.

“I trust not,” answered Grandma Hausen, encouragingly. “We won’t give up in the very beginning, at any rate. It is rising fast, isn’t it, Julia? Then I think we had better

get the children up stairs, while you and I look about a little."

In terrified silence Cecil followed the old lady's directions and mounted the stairs, while Mrs. Keep lifted the sleeping baby from his cradle and Angie clung sobbing to her dress. When all three were deposited in the little chamber Cecil and Eben had occupied the night before, Mrs. Keep charged them not to stir until she came back, and quickly descended to the sitting-room again. Poor Angie sobbed and screamed, and Cecil felt very sober indeed. He was certainly frightened, but there was a little feeling of excitement too, and he wondered if the house would be floated off like houses he had read of in stories of floods in other places, and where they would all be landed in the morning; or if—if they would never land at all. Where was Eben? What would Uncle Jack say when he came back to the house and there was no house? If they were all drowned—And here Cecil's heart beat fast, and he sobbed, "Oh, mamma, my mamma!"

Then he remembered that he was a boy and must be brave and strong, a comfort to his little weeping companion; so he put his arm around her, and said,

"Don't cry, Angie; I think we shall be saved somehow. Your mother said so. God can take care of us, you know."

"He can, but maybe he hasn't a mind to, now," sobbed Angie.

"He—well, he always has a mind to do the best thing; and I don't believe he wants us to be drowned," replied Cecil, puzzled how to meet this view of the case, but resolved to find consolation in some way.

Presently, Mrs. Keep and Grandma Hausen came up stairs. Their dresses were very wet, and it was evident the water had increased since the children left the lower room. Mrs. Keep opened wide the window, setting one lamp on the sill and another on the table.

"There, daughter!" said she, taking Angie into her arms; "now let us be patient as we can. It is no use to scream for help yet, but I think father will find out the plight we are

in and get us off before long. There can't be such a rise in the water without people's remembering the houses on this road; and there are plenty of boats out."

"But everybody is off at the mills and the bridge; nobody knows about us," mourned Angie.

"There is One who never forgets," said Grandma Hausen, in a quiet voice that somehow made Cecil think of his own dear mamma and strive to take hold of the thought for comfort.

Nevertheless, it seemed a long time that they waited, hearing the splash and bubble of water that seemed to fill the house, in cruel accompaniment to the monotonous roar which swelled the outer air. Cecil nestled close to Grandma Hausen, who sometimes uttered a cheerful word or patted his hand, but for the most part there was little talking.

Was it one hour? Was it two? Was it twenty? Cecil never knew,—under excitement the mind cannot well measure time,—but at last a shout came ringing over the flood—a shout

and a gruff, short bark which made Angie spring up, laughing and crying, and calling,

“Oh, father! Oh, Lion! Do come quick!” while her mother leaned far out the window, waving the lamp frantically and adding her voice to Angie’s in a way that, considering her composure during the evening, Cecil thought very surprising.

“Here we are, Simon! Do make haste!”

“All right!” shouted the cheery voice again, and there was a splashing of oars and the sound of many voices close by the house. Help had come!

If ever there were glad hearts, they were to be found in that little chamber when Mr. Keep strode in, dripping with water from his waist down, and followed by Lion, who barked and leaped and shook off a cataract of drops from his hairy coat in the excess of his doggish delight.

Angie rushed into her father’s arms; and as he lifted her to his shoulder, he said,

“Come, the boat is halfway up the stairs; we can step into it as easy as winking. Never

expected to sail out of your house, did you, wife? Well, stranger things than that have happened."

That might be true, but it certainly did seem very strange to Cecil to step into a boat and push off through the door where he had stood watching his uncle's departure that very evening. Cecil almost felt that he was in a dream as Uncle Jack received him at the end of the small voyage and carried him into a house where a blazing fire and a cup of warm milk were ready for him.

"Here we all are, safe and sound," said Mr. Keep as he placed Angie on the floor. "Why, where's Eben? He came in the other boat, I suppose, didn't he?"

"He wasn't in the house at all; he ran after you when you went out," said Cecil.

"What? Hasn't he been home since then?" asked Uncle Jack, hastily.

And then his face changed suddenly, and a great fear settled down on all hearts. Eben had not reached home. Where was he now?

The rushing of the flood suggested one possible terrible reply.

Very sober faces met all the inquiries that were at once begun for the missing boy; no one had seen him since Frank Ross parted with him just above the turn in the road leading to Mr. Keep's house.

"He promised to run right down there and go in, so I left him, for I was in a hurry to get back and see the bridge go. He couldn't miss the road, and he spoke so honest I thought he'd certainly do as he said," replied Frank to the many questions put to him.

What could have happened to the boy, who was in truth given to such honest speech that everybody trusted to his word? The anxiety increased, and poor little Cecil was quite overwhelmed by this addition to his Pennyville experiences. He begged so piteously to sit up until there was some news of his friend that Mrs. Keep compromised matters by putting him on the sofa with a shawl and pillow in the room where she and several other women were keeping watch. Here he dozed and

waked uneasily, while out of doors Uncle Jack searched and wandered, waiting anxiously for the dawn. At length it came, and with the first cold yellow rays that gleamed across the sullen sky a great shout came echoing up from a group of men far down the road.

"Found! Found!" was the cry, and Uncle Jack went striding toward the sound with nervous feet.

"There! Don't you see him, clinging to that tree over yonder? Plucky little chap! See him wave his arm this way. Bless the boy! What an escape he must have had!"

But while Mr. Keep was thus exclaiming, mopping his face with a red silk handkerchief, clearing his throat, and limping about excitedly, Uncle Jack and two other men had taken possession of a boat, and were already pushing off toward the little figure perched in a tree which stood in what had been a field, but was now only a part of the lake which this one night had spread over so much

of the village. It was really Eben, holding fast to a branch with one hand, while he waved the other to his rescuers, and who, being lifted into the boat wet, cold, and very pale, opened his stiffened lips to say, as he had said before when lost over Rattlesnake Ledge,

“I didn’t go to do it, Mr. Burney!”

What a welcome the poor fellow received from Uncle Jack in the boat, from Mr. Keep on the shore, from Angie and her mother in the house, from Cecil, who rolled off the sofa and hugged his friend in ecstasy! Then, when Eben—who had been dosed with hot tea, rubbed with hot flannels, and toasted before a blazing fire—fell asleep under so many blankets, he looked only like a great heap of bedclothes; and Uncle Jack, taking his nephew on his knee, read with solemn gladness a psalm of praise:

“Oh, give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever!”

Cecil never forgot the verse, nor the sound of Uncle Jack’s voice when he read it.

When Eben was allowed to sit up and talk, his account of himself was very simple.

"After Frank left me," he said, "I waited a few minutes to listen if I could hear any crash from the bridge, because he said he thought it would certainly go soon. Then I ran down the road to the left pretty fast, for I was provoked, and then I wanted to tell Cecil about the mill. I saw the lights in the house, and just as I was 'most opposite to 'em I ran splash into some water. I had an idea I could wade through it—that it was a big puddle or something; so I took a few steps on, and the first thing I knew I was out of my depth. Well, then I tried to strike out and swim a little, but the tide just carried me along. I went pretty near the house, and I called as loud as I could. The water was cold, and my clothes were so heavy I began to give up; only just then I struck against that tree and managed to cling hold of it, and finally to get up into it."

"Poor Eben! Weren't you dreadfully frightened?" asked Cecil.

"Well, you might call it by that name, I guess," said Eben, dryly. "And the scare wasn't done when I got into the tree, either. I thought it might be torn up by the water, or that I might fall off, or that maybe I had floated so far nobody'd ever find me. I thought I'd run away, and now I was going to be drowned—just like boys are in books when they disobey. I tell you, I just wished I'd never seen Pennyville! I guess I thought of every mean thing that ever I did, too," added Eben, confidentially, to his friend. "And I concluded that if ever I did get home, I wouldn't do so many shabby things as I had, so 't I shouldn't have 'em to remember next time I got drowned."

There was a quiver of Eben's lip as he said this that quite contradicted any drollery there was in the words, and Cecil leaned close to his playmate in sympathetic silence. He had not been without similar thoughts himself during the time when the flood had seemed ready to sweep away the house and its inhabitants.

The waters went down more rapidly than

they had risen, and the second day after the eventful night described the river was flowing in its accustomed channel as calmly as if it had never passed the present bounds. But the mischief it had done was not so easily put beyond notice; the broken mill, the piers where had stood the large bridge, the washed-out roads and banks, the displaced fences, and general look of dilapidation over the whole lower portion of Pennyville, told the story plainly.

Word began to come from the upper end of the valley, where the flood had risen much more quickly and caused even greater destruction than here. The boys listened eagerly to stories of barns floated away bodily with their contents, of flocks of sheep drowned in their pastures, of people driven from their homes by the hungry tide, which scarcely allowed them time to escape with their lives, leaving all else at the mercy of the waves.

One life only had been lost: a very aged man—"Old Father Cameron," as he was called by the neighbours—was swept away and drowned.

"The water just came up all of a sudden and knocked the little old cottage into a heap before any one had warning of it," said a man who had made his way down to Pennyville, and was telling Mr. Keep the story. "The old gentleman was in the porch; and when the water swept him off, he called back to his wife, just as calm and pleasant, 'Good-bye, mother; don't fret after me.' When we found him next morning, his face was so smiling and peaceful it seemed as if he had just gone home rejoicing. His wife smiled too when she saw it, and never said a word of complaint. She says it can't be long before she follows him. Well, this valley will never know a better man than he has been since he came here forty years ago. There will never be any one more missed than he will."

The speaker wiped his eyes without any attempt to disguise his emotion over the recital of an event which touched many hearts in the neighbourhood, for "Father Cameron" was widely known and beloved.

"He wasn't anything but just good, though,"

said Cecil as the boys talked over the incident together. "I know, for I asked Uncle Jack about it."

"Just good is considerable to be, I think," said Eben, bluntly. "'Tisn't such easy work for most folks, I am sure."

"Yes, of course; but I thought he must have been very rich or wise, or have done some great things, everybody seemed to think so much of him. But it was only just because he was good. Somehow, it doesn't seem enough to live eighty years and not do any more than he did. I want to be more than just a good man, though I want to be that too," said Cecil, knitting his brows in a perplexed fashion.

"That's because you have a chance to be more, I s'pose," replied Eben. "I think a man ought to be up to all his chances and make the most of them. But a man can't be any more than he has a chance to be, and goodness is always to be the first thing. I can't explain it very well, but I know how it looks to me. I suppose Father Cameron did

just the best he could all the way through in everything. I'd like to be that kind of a man myself."

"So would I; but I can't help thinking I'd like to have bigger things to do," persisted Cecil. "I wouldn't like to be drowned, though. Eben, what do you suppose grandma will think when she hears all about the freshet?"

"I think we must give her the opportunity to hear about it as soon as possible," said Uncle Jack, coming in just in season to hear the last question. "How soon can you be ready to start for home, boys? Eben, do you feel able to travel yet?"

"Oh yes, sir," was Eben's prompt reply. "I feel as well as ever now, only a little lame, and that won't last much longer."

So shortly after this conversation the boys bade adieu to Mr. Keep and his family, with many last words to Angie and lavish caresses for Lion. The ride home was toilsome and slow, the roads in wretched condition, and all the party weary enough when finally they

reached Elm Terrace. Reports of the great freshet had reached Sharon, and their prolonged absence had made grandma anxious and gave double joy to her welcome. You may be sure she had to listen to many accounts of the travellers' adventures, and for a long time the boys thought and talked much of the remarkable flood at Pennyville and their experience there.

CHAPTER VI.

SCHOOL EXPERIENCES.

T was quite a surprise to Cecil on his return to Elm Terrace to find that Larry Holbrook was established there at work as handily as if he had always belonged there.

"Mrs. Burney has promised to employ me all the fall and most of the winter," said Larry, in reply to Cecil's eager questions. "She gives me good pay, and I go home every night, so I can see how mother and the children are getting along. Mr. Denny plans my work and tells me what to do."

"Do you like it?" asked Cecil.

"First rate," said Larry, promptly. "I don't believe Mr. Denny thought I should be good for much at first, but to-day he said I was a handy chap and should earn my wages."

"Mr. Denny doesn't often praise any one,

so I think he must like you pretty well. How is your sister—the sick one, I mean?" asked Cecil.

"Susie will never get any better, I expect," said Larry, soberly. "She is real patient, though, and so pleased when any one is good to her. She liked those picture-books you sent first rate."

Larry's tone was grateful, although he expressed no word of thanks, and Cecil understood it. He walked away, thinking quite gravely of little Susie and planning what he could do to give her some additional pleasure; and with this thought in his mind he entered the house, intending to look over his treasures and select something from them for her benefit. But grandma met him with a piece of information that quite banished Susie Holbrook and her wants from his mind for the time. It was decided that Cecil was to attend the village school in company with Eben, and they were to begin that very day.

"That is jolly, grandma! You must let me shout," cried Cecil. "I always wanted

to go to school, and thought it a shame I was made to study at home. It wasn't so bad with mamma, she made things so clear and interesting. But I was dreadfully afraid she would make me have a governess while she was gone, and that would have been too miserable. But I might have known she wouldn't, though."

"Why?" asked grandma, with an appearance of interest.

"Well, governesses do very well for *girls*," began Cecil, "but—"

"But they are altogether too good for boys, eh?" interrupted Uncle Jack. "I quite agree with you. Only I hardly thought you were so humble as to own it."

Cecil laughed as he ran away to get ready, and made no more self-important remarks that morning. Eben, who had attended school before, was not so pleased as Cecil at the prospect before him, but he rejoiced at having his friend for a companion, and the boys set off quite merrily. Uncle Jack gave them a note for Miss Fontaine, the teacher, who

welcomed them kindly and gave them desks side by side.

Looking about, Cecil discovered that the school-room held many of his village acquaintances and playmates. There was Georgie Bell close by, while Gracie sat in the opposite corner; Archer Clavering and his brother nodded at him from afar, and across the aisle sat Sylvie Deane's own sweet self, her pretty face all dimples and smiles of recognition.

At recess she gave Cecil an enthusiastic welcome, and the general play which followed was so enjoyable that at its close he felt quite acquainted with all the pupils, even those to whom he had never spoken before. Altogether, the first day's experience was very agreeable, and Cecil reported himself to grandma at night in a state of enthusiasm.

"I had 'Perfect' for all my lessons, grandma—she puts us all down in a book, you know; and my conduct-mark was better than anybody's: she says I will get to be a monitor pretty soon if I keep on—but Archer Clavering got three checks for whispering.

And oh, grandma, everybody, the girls and all, recite poetry Friday afternoons, and I want you to choose me something perfectly splendid to say, 'cause Sylvie said she knew I'd have the nicest piece among the boys."

"Say 'bout free little mice sat in 'e barn to spin, pussy came by and popped her head in," said Benjie, who had been greatly interested in that lyric from his "Mother Goose" of late, and was trying to teach it to Morgiana. "Mayn't me go to 'cool wis you, Cecil?"

"When you are old enough, Benjie darling," said his brother, with an air as if he felt the weight of years pressing on his own curly head. "Eben says he used to declaim up at Swampscott; I mean to go and ask him what kind of poetry is the best."

Cecil departed, first calling Mop and indulging in the frolic which always preceded their going out of doors in company.

Probably no one but Cecil would have thought of calling Mop "the handsomest dog in the country," but he was undoubtedly smart-looking, and any thought of ugliness

was dispelled by a look at his eyes. They were soft and beautiful, full of intelligence, and at times brimming with fun. Tipping his head on one side, he would look up at his master with deep interest; and if Cecil bade him "come for a walk," then was the time to see Mop in ecstasies. At once he would spring up, describing with his body and limbs most extraordinary angles, and executing gymnastics that in variety, energy, and awkwardness excelled any "system" that was ever invented; he would sneeze, roll over, beg, jump clear off the floor and come down with a clumsy end-for-end or side-for-side somersault with a great thump. He would stand on his hind legs and paw at the door knob, whine, rub his nose against Cecil's arm or lick his hand all over, and then race back and forth across the room as if he were mad, until, the door being opened, he would rush away as if on a wager. He always came bounding back at the sound of Cecil's whistle, however, and circling round and round him, seemed to ask by his actions for the words of encourage-

ment and caressing his young master never withheld. A great affection had grown up between the two, and many times Cecil said to himself,

“How good mamma was to think of getting Mop to keep me from being so lonely while she is away!”

Eben's experience at Swampscott had certainly made him proficient in “declamation”—at least so Cecil thought when he had persuaded his friend to give him a specimen of his powers that evening up in the barn loft. Eben gave some spirited verses about William Tell so excellently that Cecil was filled with admiration.

“Nobody can beat that,” he exclaimed. “I don't see how you do it, Eb.”

“Father trained me when I wasn't much more'n a baby,” said Eben, much gratified at his friend's praise. “I don't expect I'm great in grammar and things, but I shouldn't wonder if I could beat Georgie Bell at speaking.”

So indeed it proved; and whatever Eben's

awkwardness or deficiencies in other matters, he was certainly the hero of Friday afternoons in the village school.

The days went by peacefully and pleasantly until Cecil had ended the second week of his school-life. He was rushing breathlessly to school on Monday morning, for his "good marks" had carried him to the position of monitor, when he overtook Sylvie Dean, wrapped in her scarlet cloak and hopping along like a plump little robin.

"I am bringing you an apple, Cecil," she said as he joined her. "It's the kind grandpa calls like me, 'cause it is a 'Nonesuch.'"

"Thank you," replied Cecil. "But, Sylvie, I must hurry, because I am monitor this week, and it isn't very early now. Won't you please run?"

"No," said Sylvie, calmly; "I thought I should go down to Warren's and spend five cents that grandpa gave me. But I shan't be very late, and you mustn't mark me, Cecil."

"Why, Sylvie!" cried her friend, greatly

surprised; "you know I'll have to do my duty: that's what Miss Fontaine says about monitors."

"Yes, but it's your duty to take care of me and please me, else I wouldn't have promised to marry you," said little Sylvie, with perfect composure. "Georgie Bell would, any way. He never tells of me when he is it, and I don't suppose you want me to like him the best, do you?"

"Then he tells a lie, or acts one, and it's just as bad," cried Cecil, completely bewildered at this astonishing remark from his little friend. "Oh, Sylvie—"

But Sylvie tripped past the schoolyard gate without one backward glance, and Cecil looked after her, almost choking with a mixture of vexation, amusement, and surprise. He thought she must mean a joke; and yet, when he reflected that he had certainly discovered in these last two weeks that Georgie Bell was not particular to be perfectly honest always, he felt very uncomfortable. He watched the door feverishly until the five-min-

ute bell struck and the key was turned, and then gave it up with a sigh.

Every Monday morning the children found a motto neatly and distinctly printed on the blackboard facing their desks, and Cecil almost thought that Miss Fontaine must have had Georgie and Sylvie in mind as he looked up and read the one she had selected for the present week :

“IT IS REQUIRED THAT A MAN BE FOUND
FAITHFUL.”

“Means me too, I s’pose,” thought Cecil, directly. “Dear me! thought it was nice to be monitor, but ’t isn’t.”

The first class were reciting, and Miss Fontaine’s back was toward the door, when it opened softly, and Sylvie crept in. She glanced pleadingly at the monitor’s desk, and Cecil’s courage wavered as he met her eyes. He didn’t know it would be so hard to report his little favourite. Then he pinched his hands together, and said slowly,

“Number twenty-one, tardy.”

"Twenty-one may write," said Miss Fontaine, without turning her head.

It was the rule that whoever was late must write his or her name on the blackboard, adding to it the number of minutes late, and let it remain there all day for the school and chance visitors to read.

Sylvie took the crayon in her dimpled fingers and glanced up at the clock. She never could remember the queer figures; telling the time always puzzled her, and she stood knitting her pretty brows, troubled and pouting. Somebody gave a sudden cough, and a boy in the corner twinkled his hazel eyes encouragingly at her and held up his ten fingers spread widely once, twice, and then nodded. She understood that, so there was slowly put on the board, in rather large crooked letters, "SYLVIE," and twenty little straight marks straggling after it. The corner boy twinkled his eyes comically at Cecil, who half smiled, and—as the monitor only spoke aloud the tardy names—wrote down Eben's name on the slate; and he didn't mind

that at all. Poor Sylvie went to her desk, looking flushed and almost tearful. Cecil did mind that, you may be sure.

That one little "c" for "communicating" was all that went down against Eben's name for the day, but it seemed as if Sylvie Deane was determined to have her name repeated as many times as possible. She laughed and played and drew pictures on her slate to make the other children laugh; she ate an apple behind her book and snapped the seeds at Cecil; she nibbled candy, and made a frog of her handkerchief and jumped it almost up to the ceiling. At recess she played with Georgie Bell and would not look at Cecil; though she spoke more than once in a tone meant for him to hear of her opinion about "people that pretended to like other people, but wouldn't oblige them the least bit."

"And I really do like her so much," said poor Cecil, in a moment of mournful private conference with Eben. "But it's dreadful to have her grow so naughty all at once; I never supposed Sylvie would want to be dis-

honest. I think school is a very bad place. It will be the ruin of Sylvie, I'm sure."

"Pooh! No, it won't," said Eben, with philosophy. "She'll act as bad as she can to-day, and then she'll feel dreadfully sorry to-morrow. She is having a tantrum, as Aunt Celindy says, and she will get over it. As for school, well, lots of people cheat, anyway, and I s'pose they would in other places besides school just as much."

But Cecil could not take comfort in his friend's philosophy; and when, at nearly the close of school, he saw how his slate was written over with Sylvie's name, his heart quite failed him. Such a list of penalties was quite appalling, and he couldn't help feeling that he himself was partly to be blamed for it. If he could only have helped reporting her tardiness, she would not have been angered into defying him and the rules of school. She would never forgive him when she found into how much disgrace a report of all her naughty pranks had put her; it was a very dismal state of things.

Then a bright thought came to his mind. Suppose he were to take her disgrace himself; suppose he should write down his name instead of hers, and let Miss Fontaine give him the punishment. She would think him very naughty to play when he was in a position of trust, but Sylvie would think he was very kind and heroic, and then she would listen to him when he told her that he had to report her tardiness because he must be truthful. Foolish Cecil hastily wrote his own name over Sylvie's; she was so little, and she didn't really mean to break so many rules. He began to feel himself quite knightly and heroic, and to imagine how the other boys would admire his self-sacrifice for friendship, and how Sylvie would love him.

"It is required that a man be found faithful" suddenly loomed before his eyes. It was as much a lie to change Sylvie's name for his own as it would be not to report her mischief at all. To suffer her punishment would be much easier than to tell the truth and let this wretched quarrel go on; but he

must be "faithful," he mustn't tell a lie, though it looked such a glittering, generous one.

Miss Fontaine looked surprised, as well she might, at the appearance of Cecil's slate, smirched with erasures and crossed with uncertain lines.

"What does this mean, Cecil?" she asked, pointing at the letters of his own name faintly showing through writing over them.

"I—well—you see—I didn't like to put Sylvie down so much, and I set out to take her marks. But it wouldn't have been true," said Cecil, faintly.

"Certainly not," said Miss Fontaine. "But I don't understand."

"Please," cried Cecil, interrupting—"please do excuse Sylvie part of them. She is so little, and I don't think she meant to be so naughty. We—we quarrelled this morning, and she wanted to vex me and make me report her because she knew I didn't like it. I wish you'd forgive her, Miss Fontaine."

The teacher only smiled as she bade him

return to his desk, and Sylvie began to sob in her mite of a handkerchief as she heard what a long list followed her name. There was an explosion of tempers when the children were dismissed and assembled in the yard.

"She didn't mean all that, of course," said Grace, comforting the small weeping culprit in her arms.

"Well, but I didn't want to put it down," cried Cecil, distressed. "I hope you didn't expect me to lie, though?"

"You needn't lie; you just needn't see all she did," said Georgie.

"But a monitor is to see," began Cecil.

"Fiddlestick! I wouldn't go and tell of everything; and a little girl, too!"

"Then you'd be untrue," said Cecil, in great wrath.

"And you pretend to be all good, I s'pose?" said Georgie, mockingly. "My father says he don't approve of monitors, and I don't, too. It's just setting us up to tell of each other, and that is mean. Everybody despises a telltale, and I say she ought not to expect

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"She didn't mean all that, of course," said Grace.

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us to be one. For my part, I won't; I'll be honourable!"

A murmur of admiration greeted Georgie's plausible speech as he looked grandly around, and Cecil was perplexed and troubled.

"But I don't think it is like that," he said.

"No more 't isn't," said Eben, suddenly and stoutly, coming to his friend's relief.

"It's like being a soldier on guard; he can't let another desert and go past him, because it's his orders not. He isn't the commander himself, but he has his duty to do, and he must do it, if it's against his own brother. Miss Fontaine don't set us up just to tell of each other, and there's nothing mean about it. She makes us monitors to help each other keep the rules better, and to help her teach us better, 'cause she don't have to keep watching our actions all the time while she hears us recite. I tell you what: if you want to lie or cheat when you are put up to be trusted, I don't, nor Cecil don't; and it would be more to your credit, Georgie Bell, if you liked the truth as well. You make a great fuss about 'telling

tales,' but cheating is a sight worse in my opinion, and lying isn't 'honourable' that ever I learned."

"True, Eben," said Miss Fontaine's voice close by. "George, it is for your benefit to believe him."

Miss Fontaine certainly had very inconvenient ears the children thought as then and there she gave them a little talk about faithfulness that made their cheeks tingle with shame.

Cecil and Eben walked home together without any further discussion, but Georgie Bell was very angry, and the result of the day's trials did not end here.

CHAPTER VII.

HELPING LARRY.—THE BONFIRE.

RANDMA listened patiently to the story of Cecil's troubles, comforted him with the hope that Sylvie was really too affectionate and sweet-tempered to remain angry a long time, and gave her approval to his and Eben's definition of the monitorship. Then, as it is one of the best ways to forget our own trials by thinking about the greater trials of some one else, she set him to select a book and some papers for Larry to take to his sister, while she put up a basket of dainties to tempt the little girl's sickly appetite.

“And I wish you would find out, if you can, whether anything is troubling Larry more than usual; he has looked very sober for a day or two, and does not whistle at his work as he used. I thought perhaps he

would be more likely to talk freely with you than with a grown person," said grandma, smoothing Cecil's curls. "Only you must be gentle and not tease him; he is very independent, and afraid of seeming to want help in anything he can accomplish by his own exertions."

"Don't you think that is good in him, grandma?" asked Cecil. "I like him just for that—because he has so much pluck."

Grandma smiled, and Cecil ran off to find Larry, who was diligently at work in the woodyard, and who, though usually glad to see his little friend, to-day gave him but a sombre greeting.

"Is Susie any worse?" asked Cecil, after giving grandma's message about the basket of jelly and watching his companion's sober face a while.

"I don't know; I suppose so," said Larry, gravely. "Why?"

"Because I thought you looked sad about something," returned Cecil. "Is anything the matter, Larry? Perhaps I can't help you

any, but maybe you'd feel better for telling; I do sometimes."

"I—it's nothing but what will always ail me," said Larry, swallowing hard and winking fast as the sympathizing tone and words fell on his ear. "Things don't go right at our house; Susie is sicker, and mother can't get work, and can't do it if she does, and I want some money, so it 'most kills me. I believe I'd walk on hot coals to get what I want, and here I can only earn just enough to keep the children fed."

Larry spoke impetuously, as if there was, as Cecil suggested, relief in telling what had oppressed his heart for several days, and drawing his jacket cuff across his eyes, dashed at his work again with increased zeal.

"What do you want the most?—how much, I mean? I've got a money-box that hasn't been opened for ever so long; and if you—I'd like—" Cecil stammered and rushed on: "I'm awfully sorry for you, Larry, and I like you ever so much, and I wish you'd take it."

"Twenty dollars—thirty—more'n you've

got; and I couldn't beg or borrow of you if you had five hundred, either," cried Larry, raking desperately at the chips. "But you're kind, and I'm obliged to you for that; and don't mind if I talk cross, 'cause I don't feel it to you. Only to things. I can't talk any longer, for I'm in such a hurry. Mother hasn't any wood to burn, and I want to hurry through with this job, so as to go home early enough to get her a load."

"Where will you get it?" asked Cecil.

"Oh, I don't mean split wood like that in the shed. Mr. Plummer lets me gather all the brush I can find in his woods, and sometimes there are logs and windfalls, or stumps even, that I can split up, and that burn complete."

"But it's 'most tea-time now, and then it is dark right away. You never can get enough wood to make one little fire to-night," said Cecil. "And it must be such hard work!"

"I'll have to work lickety-clip, then," said Larry; and Cecil laughed aloud at the novel

expression, running off to the house as if he was on some extraordinary errand.

He came racing back almost before Larry had begun to wonder at his sudden departure, breathless, panting between every word, but gleeful at the story he had to tell :

“Grandma says we may—take old Light-foot—Eben and me—in the wagon—and carry you up home with an axe—and help you get the wood ourselves—if you like to have us. Anyway, you are not to stop to work any more. Isn’t it great fun? Eben will call it jolly, if you think so too. I always do like to go somewhere and drive ourselves.”

“That is good,” said Larry, heartily. “I’d be glad of the ride home, I tell you; but it’s pretty hard work getting sticks, and I don’t believe you and Eben better do that.”

“Oh yes, let us,” begged Cecil. “Well, I will go and get Eben while you harness Light-foot. I wish I was tall enough to bridle him myself.”

Eben was greatly pleased to join in the combination of benevolence and “fun,” and

the three boys were soon on their way to Larry's home and the woods beyond. Grandma gave them the basket for Susie, and also a luncheon to eat while riding along, that they might not feel too keenly the loss of their supper.

Cecil and Eben talked merrily, and Larry's cheerfulness seemed on the increase with every turn of the wheels until his home was reached. Then, while Eben fastened old Lightfoot and Cecil tugged and tiptoed to blanket him, Larry quickly got together an axe, a coil of small rope, and a rude hand-cart, and prepared to guide the boys to what he called his "wood-lot."

Up over the hill and into the edge of the woods they went, and there Larry valiantly attacked a fallen tree, chopping away with sturdy, well-directed strokes, while the other boys collected scattered sticks and branches, and hacked away with the hatchet which grandma had stipulated must be their only tool. In her eyes they were too young to handle the axe which Larry grasped so boldly ;

though it is certain both Eben and Cecil did not agree with her opinion.

It was almost dark under the trees when at last a large pile of firewood was collected, heaped upon the cart, and fastened securely with the cord, and they began tugging the load down the hill, the younger boys pulling in front and Larry pushing and steadying from behind.

“That’s all right,” exclaimed he, in a tone of great satisfaction, as they brought up before the little cottage. “There’s a banging load of wood—enough to last a number of days; and it’s all owing to you I’ve got it. You’re real good fellows, and I’m obliged.”

Tired, with ears and fingers tingling with the cold and their exertions, Cecil and his friend clambered into the wagon and drove away, followed by Larry’s repeated thanks and the gratified ejaculations of three smaller Holbrooks, who crowded the door to gaze after their brother’s helpers.

It was dark and the wind was chilly, but the boys felt quite “warm at their hearts,”

as Cecil expressed it, and rode along, happy at having been kind to another, and enjoying a little excitement at their responsibility in getting home alone at that time in the evening. Old Lightfoot jogged off steadily; I don't suppose anything could have induced him to run or to swerve from a straight course, but Eben took great care to hold the reins firmly and Cecil felt it needful to peer earnestly into the gathering shadows ahead, lest they should not be prepared to "meet something;" and both boys highly enjoyed the magnified and possibly quite imaginary dangers of their return.

"Well done!" cried Uncle Jack as they drove up to Elm Terrace; and grandma echoed "Well done!" as she hurried them into the house to partake of warm milk and baked sweet apples.

"Such a boy as that deserves ever so much more than we have done for him," said Eben as he departed to the lodge. "I tell you, he's what I call first rate."

Cecil agreed, and went up stairs without a

thought of what had distressed him so much at the close of school, but with many thoughts of Larry Holbrook's poverty and courage, and of the goodness that had made his own life so differently sheltered and happy.

"I shouldn't be half such a nice boy as he if I had so hard a time," thought Cecil, humbly, as he placed his curly head on the pillow. "I am very thankful God gave me dear mamma and all these happy things. If I was a man, I'd give Larry all he wants. I wonder what he would do with all of twenty dollars?"

He did not see Larry again until noon of the next day, when, running in from school, he whistled for Mop, who did not, as usual, come barking to meet him.

"He followed the Holbrook boy away from the house," said nurse. "He seems just possessed to get with him when you are gone."

"He's lonely, of course," said Cecil, going off to the outbuildings, alternately whistling and shouting for Mop and Larry.

He found them some distance off, in the

corn-crib, where Larry was husking sweet corn for drying, and Mop was snuffing and growling and wriggling about, imagining he smelled rats and extremely excited thereby.

"What a bright little dog that is!" said Larry as he laughingly watched the frolicsome and uproarious greeting between Cecil and his pet. "He seems determined to follow me all the time while you are gone, and he is real company. You don't mind, do you?"

"No, indeed," said Cecil; "I suppose he is lonely while I'm at school, and I like to have him stay with you. I'm glad he likes you, for he won't be so likely to run away from the terrace to find me. I did take him to school once, and he lay still under my desk for about an hour. Miss Fontaine had some kind of curly ruffles on her dress that shook when she walked, and Mop watched them, and all at once he jumped and caught them in his teeth, and growled and pulled and worried them like anything. I laughed so I could hardly get him away, and she told

me never to let him follow me again. He was only in fun, though."

"Do you know how much he is worth?" asked Larry.

"I heard Uncle Jack say he was very valuable. Mamma gave him to me, when she went away, for a keepsake."

"There was a man down in the store to-day asked me what I'd take for him. Mop followed me when Mrs. Burney sent me to Lawton's of an errand. I said he wasn't my dog, and the man praised him and said if he was mine he would pay me ten dollars for him. He wasn't very clean, and didn't look as if he had so much money, only he had gold rings in his ears."

"I wouldn't sell Mop for ten times ten dollars," cried Cecil, impulsively. "I hope you told him so?"

"Of course I said he wasn't mine to sell," answered Larry. "If he had been, I'd have made a bargain with him. But ten dollars isn't so large to you as it is to me."

"It isn't large enough to buy Mop, any-

how," said Cecil, positively. "Say, Larry, I wish you'd tell me what you want such a lot of money as twenty dollars for. I won't tell anybody, and maybe I can help you think of some way to earn it."

"I have got an idea of part of it myself," replied Larry. "I don't know; I'd tell you as soon as anybody, Cecil, but I guess I'll wait: maybe I'll tell you by and by. Not about how I think of raising the money, but what I want it for, I mean."

With that Cecil had to be content, and went to his dinner wondering what scheme Larry could have devised for obtaining his wishes, and why he was so unwilling to reveal it. He did not think of it long, for Eben came up and proposed to ask leave to have a bonfire in the field that evening.

"Because," said he, "Aunt Celindy says we shall have snow very soon; she feels it in the air. And after it comes we can't have one. We might make some jack-o'-lanterns before tea—Uncle Denny said we might have all the green pumpkins we wanted—and ask

some of the boys and Sylvie to come up and see the fun."

"What jolly things you do think of, Eben!" cried his friend, admiringly. "I'm pretty sure Uncle Jack will say 'Yes;' he was telling me last night about the times when he used to make fires and pumpkin lanterns, and lots of things."

Uncle Jack did say "Yes," in spite of grandma's half-expressed fears, for he remembered his own boyhood and the charms it found in the "lots of things" which his nephew had mentioned.

"Only I shall make it a condition that you do not set on fire my fences or the property of any one else," he said. "The ending of the frolic must be carefully looked after, as well as the beginning. I shouldn't take my pay in picking over apples, remember."

"We will not owe you anything but thanks for our good time; we will be so careful you will forget Mr. Plummer's fire," said Cecil.

"My land! I rather think so," added Eben, who could not yet hear any allusion

to their North woods experience without growing warm and uncomfortable.

The boys whom Cecil invited for the evening joyfully agreed to come if possible; and as Sylvie was not at school, he went around to her home to invite her also. Since their quarrel she had kept aloof from Cecil, and he felt very doubtful how she would receive him, but he was determined to make peace with her if possible. She came slipping down from stair to stair when her mother called her, and listened shyly while Cecil stated the object of his call, ending,

"Do come, Sylvie, and let's be jolly once more."

"Hm!" said Sylvie, doubtfully. "I don't know as I feel like coming; I didn't feel like going to school."

"Why not? Are you sick?" asked Cecil.

"Only in my mind," said Sylvie, with a little sigh.

"What's the matter?" asked Cecil again, going nearer the little figure standing so demurely by the door.

"I 'spect it's remorse," said Sylvie, gravely.

"Why, Sylvie—" Cecil began.

"I 'spect I sha'n't feel happy until you forgive me, and I don't know as I ever shall," said Sylvie, despondently. "I s'posed I was a pretty good girl, but it 'pears I'm like the little heathen children; only I know better, and they don't. Wanting you to tell lies, and getting cross, and all those bad marks against my name, and me telling grandpa I'd been good at school, and he calling me his darling! I wish I hadn't ever been born and was a better girl, so I do!"

Sylvie began to weep, and Cecil's soul was filled with affectionate pity:

"You darling Sylvie! Of course I do forgive you over and over, and I want you to forgive me too. I was cross myself, and then I'm the oldest, and I ought to have explained to you about monitors and being true in all things; for of course you didn't mean to be so naughty, and I'm going to ask Miss Fontaine to excuse part of your marks."

Cecil's attempt at consolation was not much

less confused than Sylvie's speech of repentance, but the children understood each other, and peace was made between them.

"I cried and cried last night," said Sylvie, "after I told mamma all about it. She said I was very naughty. Then I learned a hymn that goes like this :

'Whatever I may do or whereyer I may be,
Although I see him not, yet God sees me;'

and she said I must think of that when I wanted to be naughty—not to be afraid of God, you know, but to love him for always watching a little girl like me and wanting me to be good. So I shall, I 'spect; I mean to try."

"Your mamma talks like mine, I think," said Cecil.

"Mammas are lovely, I think," said Sylvie. "Well, I'll come to the bonfire if she will let Michael bring me and your girl is going to see after us."

"She will, and Uncle Jack too. Good-bye, Sylvie; I'm real glad we are friends again;" and so saying, Cecil ran home light-hearted.

The bonfire proved a great frolic that evening. Uncle Jack himself helped the boys pile it up and arrange it to burn to the best advantage; it flamed up high in the air, far above their heads, lighting up all the field and reddening the figures of the boys as they pranced about like wild Indians.

Eben had made most grotesque masks of the jack-o'-lanterns, and there was one for each boy; so when the bonfire burned low, they poised the grinning things on their heads and formed a comical procession through the darkness from the field to the terrace, where grandma looked out and laughed heartily at them, and then asked them all in to a feast of nuts and apples.

Sylvie, in her scarlet cloak, danced about in great glee, enjoying the whole, and Benjie's only grief was that Morgiana wouldn't like it as well as he did, but ran spitting and growling under the piazza after scratching the chubby hands which tried to make her a guest at the frolic. As for Mop, the fire excited him even more than it did Morgiana,

but in a different way, and he joined in all the fun with wonderful barks and gymnastics.

When the guests had gone, Eben and Cecil went back to the field, carefully extinguishing every bit of fire remaining, and pouring water all about the place.

"It's all right, and we've had a splendid, splendidest time!" reported Cecil to his uncle.

But George Bell, who had refused the invitation Cecil gave him in the hope of softening his anger, watched the glow of the fire from afar, and said, as he turned sullenly away,

"I'll pay up those boys yet."

CHAPTER VIII.

A SAD PUZZLE.

MRS. DENNY'S feelings regarding the state of the atmosphere were not far wrong; for when Cecil awoke the next morning, the first snow of the season was falling softly. It had already spread a light veil over the blackened remains of last night's fire and coated grandma's flower-beds until they looked like great frosted cakes, as Cecil said. He had never before been at Elm Terrace so late in the season, and filled the breakfast-hour with chatter of the sled he must have and the sport he must plan if he were to be in the country this winter.

"It will be a great deal nicer than anything at Central Park, or even to be travelling, I think," he said. "Uncle Jack, don't you think I may have a sled? All country boys do."

"How long since you told Eben what all city boys must do?" laughed his uncle. "Well, yes; I suppose sleds are rather a necessity at this season. I think I can find one that belonged to grandma's youngest boy once, which you can use at present, while I am looking after the building of a superfine one suitable for a city boy in the country."

"Oh, Uncle Jack!"

"Yes, or perhaps I should say two superfine ones, for I observe that you and Eben want things alike," continued Uncle Jack, demurely. "Scarlet is a good colour to paint them, I think—scarlet, with black or yellow stripes, and some very high-sounding names, such as 'Dragon,' or 'Lightning Dodger.'"

"Oh, Uncle Jack!" cried Cecil again. "How perfectly— Grandma, you must let me say 'splendid!' And I don't see why you object to it any way; it's a word that means lots, I'm sure."

"It means too much," said grandma, quietly. "It covers everything from gingerbread to a menagerie—from a penny toy to

a steamboat. I prefer you should enlarge the number of your adjectives, my dear boy, or you will wear this unfortunate one to rags, applying it to everything, as you do."

Cecil went to school perfectly happy, dragging behind him a somewhat weather-beaten sled which Uncle Jack had brought from the hiding-place which had held it since his own juvenile days. The runners sank through to bare ground at every step, but Cecil did not mind that; it was enough for him that it was snowing, that winter pleasures were at hand, that Uncle Jack was planning such delights for himself and Eben. He was so filled with glee that he almost forgot to kiss Benjie for good-bye and give Mop his farewell frolic. By grandma's permission the boys carried their dinner to school that they might have a longer time to play; and as they drew Sylvie home on the sled at night, it was late before they reached the terrace.

The snow had continued to fall, and was now quite deep. Cecil came stamping and puffing into the house, shaking the powdery

flakes from his clothes, and admitting that for once he was quite tired out with play.

"But we've had a good time," he said. "Georgie Bell wasn't at school, but the other boys had sleds too, and we had such fun. Where's Mop?"

"Likely he's followed the Holbrook boy; he mostly does," said Jane, to whom Cecil addressed the question after whistling and calling all about the house.

But neither Larry nor Mop could be found, and dismay seized Cecil's heart when grandma said,

"Why, Larry went home at eleven o'clock, and has not returned. I sent him with orders to the mill at the end of the village, and told him to keep on home after the errands were done, as there was no work planned for him this snowy weather."

"Do you suppose Mop can have followed him?" asked Cecil, anxiously.

"I don't think Larry would have let him go if he knew it; perhaps he slipped away to meet you coming from school."

But as neither nurse, Benjie, nor Jane had seen Mop since the morning, and as Uncle Jack said the same when he came in, it seemed probable that the little dog must have followed Larry, of whom he was very fond, and by reason of the storm and the distance to the cottage Larry had concluded not to bring him home until he came to his work the next day.

To please Cecil, Uncle Jack made inquiries after tea in the village, but no one had seen Mop, and his master was forced to be content to believe that his pet was safely housed in the Holbrook cottage.

"If I only knew it certainly, I shouldn't mind at all," he said as he went dolefully to bed. "But if he should be really lost!"

"Don't imagine that at all," said grandma, cheerfully. "Just think Mop has gone on a visit, and how he will please poor Susie by his tricks and frolics."

Larry did not come to his work until very late the next morning; and as grandma knew Cecil would be less impatient if occupied than

if waiting idly, she sent him to school at the appointed time in spite of his reluctance, promising that if Larry did not come before noon Mr. Denny should go to his house and bring back Mop. At ten Larry appeared, but no frisking little dog with him; and when Cecil came home, grandma had no good news to tell.

“He started to follow me yesterday morning, but I knew I was going clear home, and I drove him back twice. The third time I came back in sight of the gate, and watched him trot almost to it, hanging down his head and tail, and looking just as he always does when he can't follow you. Then I ran, for I was in a hurry, and I haven't seen anything of him since.”

So said Larry in reply to Cecil's eager questions, and told the same story to Uncle Jack and Mr. Denny. It looked as if Mop must be really lost, and Cecil roamed about, feeling very disconsolate and imagining all sorts of accidents which might have befallen his pet. As he stopped to ask for the twen-

tieth time what Larry really thought had become of him, he saw that the boy was counting over something which he thrust hastily into his pocket at Cecil's approach.

"Oh, have you earned the money?" asked the little boy, half forgetting his trouble in curiosity and surprise.

Larry flushed crimson and looked angry, then recovered himself, and said, not unkindly,

"Well, I didn't mean you should know it. However, I have got fifteen dollars, and that's half enough. But you mustn't tell, Cecil, or I shall be provoked."

"What is it for? How did you get it? You know I don't just tease to know for the fun of it, but I like you, and I should like to help you if I could and you'd let me."

"You are a kind little chap, that's a fact," said Larry, so heartily that his companion did not mind the objectionable adjective. "How I got the money is a secret, but part of it is to get Susie a chair. The doctor says one reason her back hurts so is because we

haven't anything easy enough for her to lie on; and then the moving her from one place to another is bad. He told me about some kind of chairs that tip clear back like a bed or set up as straight or as leaning as you want, and that have little wheels to be pushed about with, and he said Susie needed one. That's what I want to get if I can. But remember and not tell, won't you?"

"Oh yes," said Cecil. "I think it will be grand for Susie, and you are a real nice brother. I hope you'll get it. Oh dear! I do wish I could find Mop. It makes me 'most crazy."

But Mop could not be found. Uncle Jack had searched and inquired in vain; he offered large rewards for any news of him, and ordered a description of him printed and advertised, and came home rather discouraged.

"No, Cecil, I don't think he is killed or lost in the snow; it is much more probable he has been stolen, but I don't exactly see how it could be done. His value would be evident

to a person who understood such matters, and in the city he could be easily disposed of; but here he was well known, and I think a thief would have trouble to get him away."

Cecil turned to the window to hide his tears at these words, which seemed to cut him off from hope of seeing his dear little dog again, and Uncle Jack continued his conversation with grandma :

"If suspicion rested on any one here, it was Larry who saw him last. But of course he has neither temptation nor opportunity to dispose of him ; besides, I believe him to be honest."

"He is very poor, you know," suggested grandma.

"True ; but he would have no chance to sell the dog if he took him. By the way, I wonder if Larry is in trouble at home ? He seemed very sober and constrained this morning when I talked with him, and he wouldn't tell me what he did with his holiday-time yesterday."

On Cecil, listening at the window, the talk

fell with a sudden flash of conviction; he stood still a moment with changing colour and throbbing heart, then burst into impetuous speech.

"Uncle Jack, grandma," he almost screamed, "he did—he did! He told me a man with earrings wanted to buy Mop of him, and Larry said he'd sell him if he only owned him. It was ten dollars, and Larry wanted twenty, and to-day he has got fifteen; only he said the way he got it was a secret he never should tell: and I know it was Mop! The man teased for him. Oh, he did have the temptation—for Susie, you know; and I believe he sold my darling Mop. He said ten dollars was bigger than a dog. Oh, the hateful, dishonest boy! I'll never forgive him for ever and ever!"

"Cecil!" said Uncle Jack, very sternly.

But as the words trembled out of the boy's impulsive lips he dashed away without listening to his uncle's call, and after a few bewildered remarks grandma and Mr. Burney followed to prevent the mischief that his

hasty temper might do, and to examine into the mystery so suddenly brought up before them.

Red with wrath and furious with the sense of his loss, Cecil was speaking violently, while Larry, white, defiant, listened dumbly. He turned as Uncle Jack came up.

"Mr. Burney, sir," he said, in a choked voice, but holding his head erect, "if I'm accused of stealing, it's time I quit work in this place. Good-bye."

"Stay, Larry," said Uncle Jack, putting his hand on the lad's shoulder; "you shall not be acccused until there is proof. For my part, I believe you are honest, and Cecil is too excited now to know what he is saying."

"But I do know!" cried Cecil, furiously.

"Hush, my boy!" and Uncle Jack's tone was one to be obeyed. "Larry, tell me all about the man you say asked to buy Mop—his appearance, his words, and all you recall."

This Larry did, turning quite away from Cecil and looking very white, but speaking without hesitation.

"Now, what about the money Cecil says you have just obtained?" asked Uncle Jack.

"There it is," said Larry, passionately, thrusting a crumpled wad into Mr. Burney's hand. "It is mine honestly, and he lies if he denies it."

"This is a large sum for a boy to possess who earns no more wages than you do. Will you not tell me how you obtained it, Larry? And then you will be set right, and Cecil shall beg pardon for his unjust accusations."

"Two dollars I got for my nuts; ask Mr. Warner if I didn't. One dollar I got for doing errands for Mrs. Blaine; she'll say so. Mr. Plummer paid me two more for helping him and for a tool that was father's, and that we didn't need and couldn't use."

"And this?" asked Mr. Burney, holding up a crisp new ten-dollar bill.

Larry stubbornly refused to tell anything more, and Cecil interposed:

"The man offered ten dollars for Mop, and you said you'd walk on hot coals to get so much money. You know you did."

"I didn't say I'd steal, though," retorted Larry. "I got it fairly, and that's all I'll say."

It was difficult to know what was best in such circumstances. Matters looked badly for Larry, yet he had always been considered honest. Forbidding him to go home yet, and saying he must have time to think over the matter, Mr. Burney took Cecil back to the house and delivered him to grandma's care, and there he raged and cried until she was at her wit's end to know what to do with him.

It was a long time since Cecil had had one of his ungovernable fits of passion, but this time he made no effort to restrain it.

"Uncle Jack will find I am right," he said. "When Larry Holbrook has to go to jail for stealing my dog, I guess he'll be sorry. I hope he'll have to stay a year."

"Oh, Cecil, Cecil," said grandma, sadly, "what a fiery little tongue! and if Larry is proved innocent, how cruel you will have been, and how wrong!"

"He did it, I know," repeated Cecil, stubbornly; and grandma pitied while she blamed him.

Eben came up to see his playmate, and was full of sympathy at the loss of Mop, but to Cecil's surprise he stoutly refused to believe that Larry Holbrook had anything to do with his disappearance.

"I don't care if he had forty ten-dollar bills," Eben maintained; "I know he did not steal or cheat to get 'em, and I am sure nobody can prove that he's dishonest."

His positive assertions led to something so much like a quarrel between the boys that grandma sent Eben home and put Cecil to bed, forbidding him to speak another word about the perplexed question. She sat by his side and read aloud to him when he had become calm enough to listen, and was very patient and kind; but altogether it was a wretched evening that settled down on Elm Terrace, and Cecil cried himself to sleep in a very unhappy frame of mind.

He would not have felt less distressed if

he had heard what Uncle Jack said to grandma when he came in late :

“There is no doubt the man with earrings that Larry describes is a suspicious character. He has been lounging about here for several days, and disappeared suddenly yesterday. I have discovered that he took the cars at Reedville and carried a large basket carefully covered. I have also found out that Larry Holbrook walked to Reedville four miles in the snow yesterday, and that is what he refused to tell me when I asked how he spent his holiday-time. The two things look ill for him, I must admit. Yet I did think he was an honest boy, if there is one.”

Grandma sighed as she listened ; her boy's loss was hard, but it seemed to her a sadder thing that the lad she had trusted should be proved so unworthy.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

OR a day or two matters seemed at a stand-still. If Uncle Jack was busy in unravelling the mystery of Mop's loss, he said nothing about it; and Cecil, having cried himself sick one day, went back to school the next to receive the pity and sympathy of his companions, and to grow accustomed to his loss as best he might. By grandma's express command he said nothing of the suspicion attaching to Larry Holbrook and none of the scholars except Eben had any idea of it. Georgie Bell was still absent, and of that Cecil was rather glad, not feeling sure of his sympathy. Larry was working with Mr. Denny at the lodge, so he and Cecil did not meet, and grandma hoped their passion would be subdued and the truth established before they came again in contact.

But though Cecil's tongue was still, his thoughts were not held in check; and the more he missed and longed for his lost pet, the higher burned the flame of anger in his heart. He would not believe there was any possibility of Larry's innocence—I fear he did not want to believe in it; and all that he had once thought so praiseworthy in the poor hard-working lad was now set aside or forgotten.

“I would have given him everything in my money-box for Susie's chair, and I would have asked Uncle Jack to help him,” Cecil said to himself. “And to think he should take my darling Mop and give him to that dreadful man, who will beat him, I'm sure!”

To the little whisper which said, “Be careful; you do not know yet if he did it,” Cecil chose to be deaf, and gave loose rein to his wrath.

Mop had been gone three days when Cecil and Eben started for a Saturday afternoon coasting frolic on Mill Hill, a favourite resort of the village boys, where they had already

worn what they called a "regular first-rate coast." It was quite at the extreme end of the village, near the mill from which it was named, and close by the millpond, which was not yet frozen over, but, deep and dark, rippled very sluggishly in the direction of the dam.

Of the two boys, Eben was decidedly the happier. Cecil felt and appeared cross and discontented, complaining of the cold, the trouble of dragging his sled up hill, and the steepness of the road in a way quite unlike his usual merry self. In this mood the other boys did not find him agreeable, and one by one they left him alone, Eben even finally saying that he "didn't bargain to slide with a bear, and would go in search of better company."

Sulky Cecil watched them run merrily away to try if the sliding were not better on the Four Corners hill, as Archer Clavering had declared it was, and solitary and disconsolate began to complain to himself:

"I don't care. They are all very unkind.

It's just the fault of that Larry Holbrook. If he hadn't stolen my dog, I shouldn't have felt so miserable"—Cecil didn't call it cross—"and I could have played. But now I've lost all my friends, and my dear little Mop too. I wish I could pay him back."

The tears welled up; and half blinded by them, the poor little unhappy lad trudged along, not noticing where he went and not caring much, so that it was away from the hill and toward home and grandma, who, however much she might blame, was sure also to pity and soothe.

The road skirted the pond; and as Cecil drew his mitten across his eyes, he stumbled against something in the path, and looked down to see at his feet a clumsy homemade hand-sled with a package tied upon it. No need for Cecil to wonder; he recognized Larry Holbrook's "Rough-and-Ready," and knew that its owner must have left it a few moments while he stopped, as he often had to do, on an errand from Mr. Denny or Uncle Jack to the miller.

"Ugly old thing!" muttered Cecil, and gave it a passionate kick.

Why, oh why, did he not control that hasty temper and keep back the angry gesture that wrought so much harm? For the sled, already drawn close to the edge of the path to be out of the way of passers-by, was close on the bank, and Cecil's angry foot gave it just the impetus which sent it down the bank and—yes, made it plunge into the deep, dark water. The splash told Cecil what he had done, and for a moment he stood still, his heart in his throat and his cheeks pale. Then a wicked little thrill went through him.

"Served him right!" and Cecil was running with all his speed away from the pond, away from Larry and confession to him of the hasty deed, away from the right, and straight into deliberate wrong.

But the satisfaction of revenge did not last long; many rods before Elm Terrace came in sight, Cecil's feet lagged heavily, and a burdensome weight seemed resting on his heart. He did not want to see grandma now;

he had lost the impulse to seek her pity and her counsel. He took a long time to put away his sled, and then went very quietly up to his own room. It did not seem pleasant there somehow; he wanted to get away from the sight of the book-shelves mamma had furnished so amply, and her photograph in its little frame on the table seemed to look sadly at him. He ran quickly to find Benjie, and engaged him in a noisy game of romps that he made to last till the tea-bell sounded. He made a very silent supper, and grandma, thinking he was tired from his play, sent him early to bed.

Cecil thinks he will always remember the Sunday that followed. In church, in Sunday-school, in the afternoon reading with grandma, in the twilight, when Uncle Jack took him and Benjie one on each knee and sang with them grandma's favourite hymns and told them a story of his own boyhood, poor Cecil was oppressed with the sense of his guilt, the secret of his yesterday's passion. He longed to confess all, but the words choked him.

He had thought it would be pleasant to feel that he was revenged on Larry, but now he could only think of how sorely he himself had injured the poor hard-working lad. He could not keep himself from wondering what Larry thought when he found his sled gone; he conjectured if the bundle on it contained something for Susie, and if she was greatly disappointed at not receiving it. The hateful splash still sounded in his ears, and he despised himself for the passion which had caused the mischief and the cowardice which had made him put off confession when it would have been so much easier than now.

"If I had only hunted up Larry and told him that I was so angry I did not see what I did!" groaned Cecil. "Now I can't tell. Nobody would love me any more, and it would all have to be written to mamma."

Poor little Cecil! He forgot that his heavenly Father would never cease to love him, and that forgiveness was waiting and ready for the penitent sinner.

He was so nearly ill the next day that

grandma kept him from school, and regarded him with great anxiety. That something more than the loss of Mop troubled him she began to suspect, and was just making up her mind to question him closely and win if possible his confidence when Uncle Jack came in.

"Well," said he, and his voice was not merry, but grave and measured—"well, the knot is untied at last."

"About Mop?" asked grandma, quickly.

"I called at Dr. Bell's this morning on business," said Uncle Jack; "and while I was waiting for him, I talked with Georgie. It seems he has been out of school with a cold this week, and had not heard of Cecil's loss."

"Well?" said grandma.

"It is not well, but ill," said Uncle Jack. "Larry Holbrook was not the last person who saw Mop; it was Georgie Bell."

"Did he steal him?" interrupted Cecil, full of surprise.

"Georgie said that on the day Mop was lost he saw the little fellow far down in the

village; Larry was some distance ahead, and Mop was sneaking along, stopping every moment or two and looking so guilty that George guessed he was following against Larry's command. At first he thought he would bring the dog back to the terrace, lest he should get lost; but having had a quarrel with Cecil, and feeling rather vexed with him, he concluded to play him a trick."

"Did he hurt my darling Mop?" asked Cecil, anxiously.

"No; he frolicked with him a little, and then shut him up in the wood-room behind his father's office. Dr. Bell was to be away all day, and Georgie thought Mop would be hidden there safely enough, and his master would be troubled and uneasy about him and think him lost. He says he planned to go and let him out toward night, after Cecil had been teased enough, but his mother would not let him go out again that day. He thought Mop would bark to be let out, and somebody might release him. For the wood-room opens out-doors, and was not locked.

Afterward he forgot about it. It was a foolish trick, but was not meant to be malicious or result in more than teasing Cecil."

"But what did become of the dog, then?" asked grandma, for Cecil could not speak.

"It is clear to my mind that the man Larry said wanted to buy him took him out of his prison. Georgie says a man of that description watched him while he was playing with Mop, and whistled to him, asking the dog's name. He saw where George took him, and it was easy to let him out when no one saw the act. Mop was valuable enough to be worth the walk to Reedville to ensure getting him away safely."

"Poor Larry!" said grandma, softly.

"Poor Larry, indeed!" echoed Uncle Jack. "I have found out what his walk to Reedville that day meant, and the knowledge fills me with regret for our injustice to him. Mrs. Holbrook and Larry have been struggling hard to lay by enough money to pay the first instalment on a sewing-machine; Mrs. Blaine will supply her with work at good prices all

winter if she can but get the machine to use. Besides this, Larry's heart has been set on purchasing an invalid-chair for Susie since the doctor told him it was almost essential to prevent her suffering so much. Of course, with the expense of living, which must be met, any extra sum accumulates but slowly, and so Larry sold a case of tools that was left him by his uncle, and which was to have been part of his capital when he learned his trade. He did not ask his mother's consent at first, because he knew she would oppose the sacrifice; she knew that the tools were worth more than he could get for them, and she knew, too, how he valued them, and how fond he was of thinking over his uncle's words and looking forward to the time when he should be able to use his gift expertly and to advantage. Mrs. Holbrook told me he would often examine them proudly, and say they were more to him than a king's sceptre. 'For,' he would say, 'when I have mastered their use, mother, I can earn all the money you want, and send Harney to college too.'

And that's all I should want to do if I was a king, I'm sure.' "

"Poor Larry!" said grandma again.

"Yes," said Uncle Jack, "and brave Larry, too. Cecil, what atonement do you propose to make for your cruel suspicions and accusations?"

If Uncle Jack expected to see his nephew ashamed and repentant, I do not think he was prepared for the tempest of sobs and grief with which the little boy replied to his severe question. When, at length, he managed to tell the secret that had oppressed him, and to sob out something of his contrition for it, his burden seemed lightened; and though he still wept bitterly, he felt that the worst trouble had passed. Grandma did not try to excuse him for what he had done or to lessen in the least degree his sense of wrong-doing and shame; but when he had grown calmer, she talked with him very tenderly and faithfully.

"If you had tried to control your fiery tongue and keep down your passionate feel-

ings all the week, you would not have to bear all the pain and sorrow that you are suffering now," she said.

"I know it," said Cecil, mournfully. "But I liked to keep talking and saying all the cruel things about Larry I could think, and I wasn't willing to leave off. I just kept making myself crosser and crosser. Oh, grandma, do you s'pose there are any other boys so naughty as I have been?"

"It is not improbable, I think," said grandma, half smiling. "But it is not with those boys you and I have anything to do now; it is with this Cecil Vaughan, and it is he whom we want to cure of his faults."

"Mamma gave me Mop to help me to be good and generous, and brave in the right, she said, and to make me grow more like Jesus in my temper. But I haven't been any of those things; I have let him make me wicked and hateful. Oh dear! I feel as if I couldn't ever be happy again," said poor Cecil.

"My darling," said grandma, "you have

had a hard lesson of how little you can do to keep yourself right and what a giant sin is for you to fight. I want you to lay it to heart and let it make you more careful, more humble, more sure to depend on Jesus for strength to do what is right and avoid the wrong. He wants you to keep your hand in his and never try to walk alone, and he means you to learn a great deal from this sad experience. Now he wants you to come to him for forgiveness and believe that he loves this naughty boy dearly and is ready to help him. 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us.' Come to him and let him make you happy again."

Then grandma uttered a little prayer for her dear boy the words of which sank deeply into his heart, and by the time Uncle Jack came back again Cecil was quite composed and ready to talk frankly with him.

"Mrs. Holbrook told me that Larry lost his sled and a bundle of groceries on Saturday, and he was out searching for them when I went there this morning," said Uncle Jack.

"He thought some one might have hidden them for fun."

"Wouldn't my money pay for the stores, don't you think? I have added ever so much since Eben and I were going to pay Mr. Plummer, and I feel as if it belongs to Larry now."

"Oh yes," said Uncle Jack; "it will more than pay. The bundle was some oatmeal for Susie, and a little tea and sugar. You shall go with me to buy them if you like, and come back with half your cash, I'll venture to say."

"And, Uncle Jack," said Cecil, more slowly, "you said you were going to get Eben and me some sleds. I—I think I ought to give mine to Larry, since I lost his, and it was not an accident, but a bad temper did it. I should like it to be just as handsome and nice as you planned it for me, and then it won't make up to him for all my bad speeches. Maybe he'll forgive me for those, though."

"And what will you do for a sled?" asked his uncle, kindly.

"I can use this little one that used to be

yours," said Cecil, with a quiver in his voice. "It goes pretty well; it is all I deserve, anyhow, and I should always feel I owed the new one to Larry. I wish you'd give Eben his just the same, please, won't you? He stood up for Larry, you know, and didn't believe he stole Mop. I know he wants a sled, and his aunt said she couldn't afford him one. So he was going to try to make one."

"Well," said Mr. Burney, "it shall be as you say. It is justice, I admit, but it is not very easy always to do what is just. I am glad you show the strength of your repentance for your fault by your readiness to make what amends are in your power. Do you want to speak to Larry yourself, or shall I do so for you?"

"I think I ought," said Cecil, manfully. "If any one had treated me so, I shouldn't think much of his just sending me word he was sorry. Only I'd rather wait until morning."

"Very well," said Uncle Jack, shaking hands with his nephew and looking pleased.

Though Cecil's head ached from crying, and his heart was still sore at thought of all the past, he confessed to himself that he felt happier than he had done for a week, and that it was quite possible he should get back his usual spirits in time.

"If I only knew that ear-ring man would treat poor Mop well!" he said to himself. "I s'pose I shall never see him again, but I wish I knew he was comfortable."

Larry Holbrook received Cecil's confession and request for pardon rather silently at first; he had been sorely hurt by the suspicion of his honesty, and he could not regard it as a small matter. But when he saw how grieved the little boy was, and how eager to make all possible amends, his reserve melted, and he gave full and hearty forgiveness.

"You're a good little chap, after all," he said. "'Tisn't strange you felt stirred up at losing your dog. But a poor boy that hasn't anything but his word can't well stand having that go for nothing."

"I'm sorry," repeated Cecil; "if you only

knew how dreadful it makes me feel! I couldn't bear it if God didn't tell me he would forgive me, and unless you forgive me too. You don't know how bad it is to have such a temper as mine."

"I guess I ain't much less of a sinner myself, if not in that particular line," said Larry, dryly. "Now, Cecil, do me a favour, will you?"

"I will do anything for you that I can," said Cecil, promptly.

"Promise not to tell Eben or any one else how my sled was lost. I won't tell mother, only that it was accidentally shoved in the pond, and how it happened we'll keep to ourselves. You're sorry enough, and there's no need of any more folks knowing what you really never meant to do."

"Oh, Larry, how good you are!" said Cecil. "I did feel bad to have Eben know how mean I was. But I want to be honest."

"Honesty don't require you to tell him," declared Larry. "As for the goods, you may pay for them, because they are a loss. But

the sled wasn't worth much, and I can make another; never mind about that."

"But I do mind, and I shall pay for that too," said Cecil. "I do feel so much better now it is settled. You're sure you forgive me, Larry, and will try to like me again?"

"Yes, indeed!" and though boys like Larry are not much given to caresses, he put his arm over Cecil's shoulders and gave the little lad a hearty squeeze. Then Cecil capered back to the house, feeling, he said, as if ten thousand pounds had been taken off his heart.

CHAPTER X.

A BOY'S SPEECH.

BEN DENNY rejoiced greatly when told of the truth regarding Mop's disappearance and the proof of Larry Holbrook's innocence, but he generously said nothing to his playmate in reproach of his unjust accusations, and tried to console him with a hope that the stolen dog might yet be recovered.

"No, I can't expect that," said Cecil, sadly. "I only hope that man won't beat him, and will sell him to a kind master. But it rather seems as if a person that steals must be cruel too, and I'm afraid Mop won't be very happy."

"I should like to give the old fellow 'hale-klumby,' I'll bet!" cried Eben, doubling his fists wrathfully. "After all, it seems as if Georgie Bell was the one to blame; for if he'd have let Mop alone, maybe the man wouldn't

have seen him again. He ought to be whipped for trying such a trick. If anybody gets mad, and hits anybody else before he knows it, that's bad enough. But to hold a grudge and play a mean underhanded trick isn't respectable."

"Look here, Eben," said his friend, after a little hesitation: "I feel pretty much as you do about it, or I did. But I've made my mind up to forgive Georgie right off without saying or thinking anything about it. I'm sure I have needed to have Larry forgive me, and I don't think I'm the one to complain when I've done so much worse myself by being angry. You see, George did not mean anything but a trick, and he supposed Mop would be all right really."

"Well, you're complete!" said Eben, with an affectionate glance.

"No," said Cecil, candidly. "Don't you remember when we got home from Pennyville we thought we were going to keep in mind what we thought of in the flood that night? You have, but I haven't; I have been naugh-

tier than I ever thought I should be again, and I find I've got to be more in earnest and mind every single thing—the littlest ones—if I am going to grow better and be ready to resist the big temptations when they come.”

“It's queer what a tug it is to be good, isn't it?” said Eben, meditatively. “Seems as though it might have been made easier just as well. But I calculate Aunt Celindy is right when she says that part of it isn't for our explaining. Come along; there's the first bell ringing.”

In one opinion the boys were agreed, and that was their high esteem of Larry Holbrook and their admiration of the sacrifice he had made of his most precious possession for the sake of his sister. Even that, however, had not been sufficient to procure the chair for poor Susie; and though by its means Mrs. Holbrook was now in possession of a machine, it would be a long time before even with that help enough could be earned to pay for such an expensive piece of furniture. The boys talked much of this, wishing they could de-

wise some means of helping the good brother to the required sum, but it was difficult to arrange any feasible plan; Larry would not accept a gift of money. Of course the boys could not by themselves get the chair, much as they would have liked to do so; so they planned, and wondered, and wished; and "Oh, if I were only a man!" was heard from Cecil's lips oftener than ever before.

Grandma was taken into their counsels at last, and it would seem that something was determined on, for the boys spent every moment of their time out of school in the library, where they kept up such a chatter and such a wholesale use of pens, ink, and paper that Uncle Jack declared they meant to bankrupt him or force him to buy out a stationer's stock if they kept on at this rate.

Cecil and Eben only laughed at this, but as the week drew to a close they grew more and more busy, and went about with such anxious faces that it was quite perplexing to see them. Friday came, and an important Friday it was, for Miss Fontaine had said

the children might ask any of their friends to be present during the "speaking exercise," and great was the fluttering of little hearts at the idea. Never did the boys con their declamations so earnestly and practice gestures so faithfully; never did the little girls take such interest in the whiteness of their ruffled aprons and the stiffness of their frilled skirts; on that Friday everything must be at its best.

One last consultation with Miss Fontaine, one more private confab with Georgie Bell behind the dressing-room door, and then Eben and Cecil took their places side by side, the former looking very earnest and steady, and Cecil with a flush coming and going in his cheeks and his eyes shining like stars, as grandma thought, looking at him from across the room. For grandma was there, and Sylvie Deane's mamma, and Aunt Laura, and Dr. Bell was there, and many others, come each one to hear and praise his or her own particular darling. And the darlings did well, each and all of them. Miss Fontaine had not

drilled them to no purpose ; and if some little voices trembled with shyness at first, they soon quieted into easy, natural tones, and the recitations went on with a simple grace that charmed all hearers.

It could not be that Cecil was nervous about his own part, for he spoke among the first and made every one laugh at his account of "A Boy's Pocket." It was not that he dreaded Sylvie Deane's failure, for after she had recited "Little Mabel," looking herself like a winsome ideal of that "fair brave little child," Cecil's cheeks kept on their changing flush and his eyes danced restlessly. At last, almost at the close of the afternoon, Miss Fontaine announced :

"An original declamation, written by two of the pupils, spoken by Eben Denny."

Cecil's hands pressed tightly together under the desk as his companion left his side and walked with his usual resolute step down the aisle. With a composed bow, tossing back his auburn hair and looking around with those keen hazel eyes, Eben began :

"My friends, it is no tale of thrilling woes or warlike prowess that I have to tell. It is of truth—unvarnished, unexaggerated truth—I speak; and for the truth's sake pray you hear me!"

(The boys got this out of an old "School Speaker" of Uncle's Jack's, and regarded it as a marvel of eloquence for an opening sentence.)

"Not far from our own doors there lives a boy who is a hero. He does not wear a soldier's plume, he has never done anything to write his name on history's page, but he is, I say again, a hero. Now, I will tell you why. This boy has lost his father—a man who loved his son as our fathers love us, and who would have done as much for him as our fathers do for us if he could. But the man died, and the boy and his mother and his four little brothers and sisters were left to take care of themselves. And the boy did it. He gave up going to school, and he gave up having play-times with other boys, and he gave up trying to have good times. He worked

at all he could find to do ; he earned all that he could get ; he gave it all to his mother, and didn't keep any pennies for marbles or taffy or fireworks. And, my friends, listen to this : he never grumbled ; he was always cheerful ; he never complained and asked help. No ; he worked as if it was the pleasantest thing a boy could do. He was brave."

Eben's voice rang out clear and true, and he made a gesture at this climax that was emphatic and natural, without mentioning the grace of it.

"In this boy's home, the abode of poverty and toil, was one little sister who was very sick. She couldn't play nor walk about. She was always sick. But she was patient. She did not fret. She was

' Gentle as the summer breeze, and mild ;
Full of sweet faith and patient cheer.' "

(Cecil had found these lines in one of his mamma's books, and insisted that they should be applied to poor Susie.)

"This boy loved his sister, and would have

cheerfully walked on hot coals to help her and make her well. He said so, but he acted so too. One day he sacrificed something he dearly liked, and gave up the best thing he owned, that his dead uncle gave him to keep for ever and ever, and he wanted to keep, and sold it, so he might have money to buy a chair which he greatly needed for this dear sick sister. My friends, this is a true story. And because one of the scholars in this school was careless and angry, and another was full of passion, a misfortune came, and people thought this boy was the cause. And he was thought to have stolen, and the money he got by his unselfish giving up was suspected, and this cheerful, brave boy was accused of stealing. How sad a circumstance! How would you feel, my friends, if it was you?

“For many days this boy was hurt and troubled because he was in disgrace unjustly, and his heart ached. Presently the truth was found out, and the careless and angry pupils who had been to blame, and the ones who treated him cruelly because they thought

him a thief, were sorry. But being sorry does not mend things entirely. The boy was kind, and forgave them; he stills works cheerfully, and hasn't money enough to get the chair for his sister. I cannot tell you all the good I know about him, but I want to ask you a question: Do you not admire such a boy, and do you not want to help him? My friends, I think you will say 'Yes,' for we have much and he has nothing. Some of our school injured him, and he forgave them; one of us was careless, and suffered for it. I think you will wish to help such a boy. My friends, I will now tell you how."

Eben paused, looking about with those hazel eyes that forgot to be merry now, and were filled with the light of an earnest, generous purpose.

"It is almost Christmas-time. We all of us expect to have Christmas gifts; we shall have more than one or two, each of us. This boy's mother cannot afford him one little one. This boy's sister will have nothing to make Christmas gay. Let us each agree to give

up one of our expected presents and ask our friends for the money it would cost. Let us put the money all together and buy a chair for that brave boy's gentle sister, and give it to him for a Christmas present. Who will do this? It is not much to give up one thing out of the much we have. My friends, I ask you to remember what Christmas means, and then I am sure you will say yes. This is all the truth I had to tell."

Eben bowed down low; and as he took his place by Cecil, the astonished listeners looked at each other, at him, and then little hands began to clap, little feet to stir, and a hearty round of applause greeted the "original declamation" so unexpectedly practical and true.

Eben had been too much in earnest with his subject to remember that he was saying something he had learned by rote; in several places he had not spoken just as he and Cecil had so painstakingly written it out, and the boy's fervour quite inspired those who had not known what he was to say. Of those in the secret, Cecil only was too excited to listen;

his head had drooped on his desk long ago. But Georgie Bell raised his hand as the applause ended, and rising, said, manfully,

"I will do what Eben says. I will ask to give the money that my very best present would cost."

Then one boy's curly head came upright, and clear and sweet his voice said,

"I too; I will do the same."

Then hands began to go up all about the room; and smiling, Miss Fontaine gave the signal for leaving seats, and the children crowded about Eben's desk and questioned and exclaimed and agreed, while the grown people laughed and talked among themselves.

"That boy is a natural orator," said Dr. Bell. "He deserves high praise."

Grandma smiled; she too was proud of Eben, but she did not think his oratory was his best gift just then. She was thinking of the boy's kind, generous heart and his sturdy resolution to carry out any good work, and of the promise in him for the future.

Well, there is not much more to tell of

that afternoon's proceedings. There was not one pupil who listened to Eben's speech who did not agree with Georgie Bell and Cecil, and promise to ask leave to give up one Christmas gift to Susie Holbrook and her unselfish brother.

"Do you know what such a chair costs? Maybe we shall have enough to get something else for Larry too," said Archer Claverling.

"It is expensive: Uncle Jack knows, and he will help us buy it. I should like to get Larry something, I'm sure," said Cecil. "I think it is grand that everybody is willing to help."

"My! I guess we are, after that speech," said Archer. "How did you ever get it up so complete and interesting, I would like to know?"

"Yes," joined in Sylvie. "How could you make up such a nice story, Eben? 'Most made me cry to hear about that boy."

"It wasn't made up; it was true," said Eben.

"But it took you to tell it," said Cecil.

"I declare, I felt like flying when you began, but I knew you'd do it just right."

Eben looked rather red and uncomfortable at so much admiration, but he was too well pleased with the solid result of his eloquence not to bear what he called "soft talk" patiently.

"I tell you," he said as he and Cecil walked home with grandma that afternoon—"I tell you, more'n half the credit of the notion belongs to you, Cecil. I'd never have thought of it alone. But that don't matter particularly, so long as Larry gets what he has wanted so much and worked so hard for. I didn't hardly expect the scholars would all be so generous, but I believe they are as nice a set of boys and girls as can be found anywhere."

"What present did you know of that you are going to give up?" asked Cecil.

But Eben pretended not to hear that question, and ran ahead without reply. He could be generous, but he did not like to hear it talked about.

CHAPTER XI.

MERRY CHRISTMAS.—CONCLUSION.

HE two weeks between that Friday and Christmas slipped away very rapidly, for there was so much to be done that every moment was full; and we all know that busy time flies swiftly.

Uncle Jack made several mysterious expeditions up to the city; the expressman was constantly bringing knobby, odd-shaped, strongly-fastened-up packages; grandma went about with an air of mystery, and was often locking and unlocking the library door; while Eben, Cecil, and small Benjie were in a state of perpetual chuckle and effervescence, bobbing about in the way of the grown people and giving a general impression that Elm Terrace held some dozen boys, instead of just three.

Twice Uncle Jack was accompanied to the

city by the two older boys and Georgie Bell, who, since the result of his mischievous trick had proved so disastrous, had left off what Eben called his "mean ways," and was good friends with both his old opponents. Nobody but Uncle Jack could have contrived to manage all three boys, take them all to select Susie Holbrook's chair, and then assist each separately to expend his hoarded pocket-money on mysterious articles kept strictly secret from the other two. He did it to perfection, however, and seemed to enjoy it as much as did the lads, who came home each entirely satisfied with the result of the expedition, and full of fun at all he had seen and heard.

Cecil's money was considerably diminished by the inroad made by the purchase of the groceries he owed Larry Holbrook, but his uncle helped him calculate so closely that he got a present for every one of the family, including Eben and his absent friends, and had two cents remaining.

"It isn't so much as I meant to give grand-

ma," said Cecil, surveying the little white plaster-of-Paris cast of a "shepherd boy" which he held in his hand. "But she will know why I hadn't much money, and I rather think she will like this, don't you?"

"I am sure of it," said Uncle Jack. "I heard her say she wanted a little statuette for the bracket in her room, and this is just the thing."

So Cecil's last doubt was allayed, and his satisfaction complete.

Cecil had been accustomed to hang up his stocking on Christmas eve, and thus receive his gifts, but this year grandma proposed to have a Christmas tree instead, and to invite the Deane, Bell, and Clavering families, all special friends of the Elm Terrace people, to join in the festivities. This was pleasant indeed; and when she added to the list Larry Holbrook and little Harney—Harney, who in all his short life had scarcely heard of Christmas trees and gifts at all—Cecil's delight knew no bounds.

"I do believe there never was such another

person as grandma," he said to Eben. "She thinks of everything that is nice for everybody else, and is always willing to take trouble to please."

"That's because she has the real Christmas spirit," said Eben, wisely. "Don't you know what Miss Fontaine said about that? Some folks have the getting spirit, but some have the giving spirit, and your grandma is that kind."

"My mamma is too," said Cecil, eagerly.

"Well, your grandma brought her up, didn't she?" said Eben, coolly. "I tell you what, it makes a lot of difference what kind of bringing up people have. You ought to be a good boy, Cecil Vaughan, with such folks as you have; and it's my opinion we ought to make considerable allowance for boys that don't have such kind of folks to keep 'em straight."

The gravity of this remark rather oppressed our impulsive boy, and he assented to it with a sigh of mingled responsibility and gratitude; but as Mr. Denny just then called them to go

with him into the woods for evergreens, both boys pranced away and postponed further weighty conversation.

It was difficult to say which of the Elm Terrace children was most uproarious and merry during the week, but on the day before the grand festival Eben certainly carried off the palm. He came up from the lodge in such a state of excitement and mirth that Cecil, who was himself practising extraordinary gymnastics on the front stairs, looked at him in positive wonder. Eben's eyes never looked so brightly twinkling, his honest face never glowed with such broad smiles; he fairly bubbled over with laughter, and seemed unable to remain quiet one second.

"What does ail you, Eb?" asked his friend, staring at him in surprise.

"Never you mind," chuckled Eben. "Christmas ails me, that's all. My land! isn't it jolly? Seems as if I couldn't hold in a minute longer."

Whereat he made a rush at his playmate, grasped him by the shoulders, and after a

playful struggle they both sank laughing and panting on the floor.

"You know something, I'll bet," said Cecil, regarding the hazel eyes keenly.

"Hope I ain't a dunce," retorted Eben, with another chuckle; then relapsing into graver tones, he said, "Do you expect your father will come really?"

"I don't know; he said 'perhaps' in his letter. If I could only have him and mamma and Madge here, I think I should be perfectly happy. But mamma can't come, anyhow, and so I try not to think about it."

"I should like to see 'em myself, I declare," said Eben. "Madge is about the prettiest girl I ever saw; she looks like a picture, somehow."

"She is better than pretty, I think," said Cecil. "Hark! There are the sleighbells; now we'll know if papa is coming."

It was not Uncle Jack who leaped out almost before Bayard stopped, and came striding up the steps; it was Cecil's own dear tall

papa, who caught him up and kissed him, and yet could give Eben a hand-shake in the first minute of greeting.

“Mamma could not endure to have her boys away from both parents this Christmas-time, so she packed me off to look after them, and here I am. I can stay two days, so make the most of me,” said Colonel Vaughan as Benjie climbed on his knee and Cecil hung on the back of his chair, while Eben stood near, gazing with all his eyes at his playmate’s handsome, stalwart father.

It was no wonder he thought Cecil ought to be a good boy with “such folks.”

If mamma could but have been present too, the children’s joy would have been perfect; it was the next best pleasure to hear all her messages from papa, and, nestling close to his side, to tell him all the incidents and experiences of the autumn months since he went away. It was not hard to tell him of the naughtiness, even: and the long talk Colonel Vaughan had with his little son when the story was told was laid away in the boy’s

heart, and would not be without its good fruit.

Evening came, and never had Elm Terrace looked more beautiful to the friendly group assembled there. Brilliant lights glowed in each room, shining on the Christmas wreaths and mottoes which tasteful hands had arranged on wall and picture-frame, over doors and windows. The folding-doors leading to the library were closed, and as the clock struck seven the children clustered before them; and led by the sweet voice of Sylvie Deane's aunt Laura, they sang a quaint old English carol, the words of which I think you will like to read:

"The shepherds heard at Bethlehem

Glad tidings of great joy,

Of a Saviour who was born for them,

And born for thee, dear boy.

They saw him in a manger lie,

So lowly was his birth:

Glory be to God on high,

And peace to men on earth.

"Though many a rule be taught in school,

Example is the best;

One boy of truth and spotless youth,
 How doth he guide the rest !
 Then take a lesson with thine eye,
 And look on Jesus' birth :
 Glory be to God on high,
 And peace to men on earth.

" He bowed to all his Father's will,
 And meek he was, and lowly,
 And, year by year, his thoughts were still
 Most innocent and holy.
 He did not come to strive or cry ;
 But ever from his birth
 Gave glory unto God on high
 And peace to men on earth.

" Like him be true, like him be pure,
 Like him be full of love ;
 Seek not thine own, and so secure
 Thine own that is above.
 And still when Christmas-tide draws nigh,
 Sing thou of Jesus' birth :
 Glory be to God on high,
 And peace to men on earth."

As the last notes died away the folding-
 doors rolled back, and there, in all its glory
 of brilliant tapers and pretty gifts, stood re-
 vealed the Christmas tree.

A murmur of delight and surprise arose from the company; and when they had looked and admired for a few moments, the gifts were distributed by Uncle Jack and Colonel Vaughan. There was something for each; and so loaded were the children's hands and arms presently that you could hardly believe that every one had given up the best and most costly gift designed for this occasion. That it was so, however, was abundantly manifested by a peculiar-looking chair which stood close by the tree—a chair with wheels and downy cushions that could be made straight or reclining at will, that had a rack in front to hold a book or toys, and handles by which it could be pushed about—a beautiful, wonderful invalid-chair which bore on its arm a card reading thus:

“From twenty healthy, grateful school-children to Susie Holbrook and her kind brother Larry; with a Merry Christmas!”

The astonishment and delight of Larry when Uncle Jack read out this card and wheeled the handsome chair toward him were beyond de-

scription. His thanks were mingled tears and smiles, and no one thought less of him for the emotion that choked his voice and made his lips tremulous. Other gifts for himself and Harney, and for the three little Holbrooks at home, were not lacking, and the heart of the courageous, industrious lad was filled with gratitude for the Christmas cheer kind friends had given him.

Eben gloried in the new sled, bright with scarlet paint, flashing with steel runners, and named "Telegraph;" and Cecil praised and congratulated and admired without envy, though he knew another sled of similar colour and beauty had gone to the Holbrook cottage that morning, and that he himself could only own and use that winter the somewhat battered, dull-hued one that had been Uncle Jack's. But our boy had done right, had made honest amends for past harm; and that feeling in his heart was better than the possession of a new sled. Cecil owned that, and was content.

"What a beauty!" he exclaimed to his friend, who stood staring at his treasure in

speechless joy. "It'll go swifter than any of the boys', you may depend. I'm real glad, Eben."

"You're going to be gladder in a minute," said Eben, with a sudden joyous laugh. "You're not the only one that can keep a secret."

And there, through the opening door, came Mrs. Denny, her plump face wreathed in smiles, and holding something tightly in her arms covered with her apron—something that wriggled and struggled and gave a smothered sneeze and whine under the apron; and before Uncle Jack could open his lips to make the funny speech he had ready, bounced out of Mrs. Denny's grasp, and rushed, yelping and leaping, upon Cecil—"Mop!" Yes, Mop! that veritable frisky dog, who licked his master's face all over with funny little whines and barks of pleasure, and clasping whom Cecil sat down upon the floor and actually cried for joy.

It was Eben who thus explained matters to his bewildered friend, sitting close beside

him on the carpet and joining in caresses of Mop:

“You see, Mr. Burney was determined to get him back, and he advertised and set the police hunting him, and did lots of things, and finally they got the man and made him tell where Mop was. And he was brought down from the city yesterday, and he was at the lodge all day, and I thought I should go crazy trying not to let you know. That’s the reason I acted so, and why I stayed up here, so you wouldn’t come down to our house,” said Eben, laughing. “Aunt Celindy just had to give up and coax him all day to keep him still; he was just possessed to scamper up here—he knew he’d got ’most home, you see; and we had to keep the doors locked, and he whined so in the night she let me take him into bed at last, and to-day he acted worse, but we were bound to give you this surprise; and oh my land! isn’t it complete, old fellow? Seems as if I couldn’t stand a bit more!”

And having thus jumbled the story of Mop’s recovery and his own feelings into one breath-

less, hurried speech, Eben flung his hands down and his heels up with a squeal of delight, and after thus standing on his head a half second came upright on his feet, looking very red and rather abashed at his own antics.

The happiest time must end some time: so when the gifts were all admired, and the cake and fruit all eaten, the guests went home with many smiling adieus and congratulations.

Sylvie Deane came back to kiss Cecil a second time and to say,

"You precious child! I am just as glad as I can be; and if you don't be the goodest boy in the world after this, it will be your own fault."

I cannot promise that our curly head has been actually the "goodest boy in the world" since that memorable happy Christmas, but it is certain he has been less passionate and hasty, more brave and generous, more humble and earnest in following Jesus, than if he had not learned the lessons taught him by the "autumn adventures" recorded in this little book.

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